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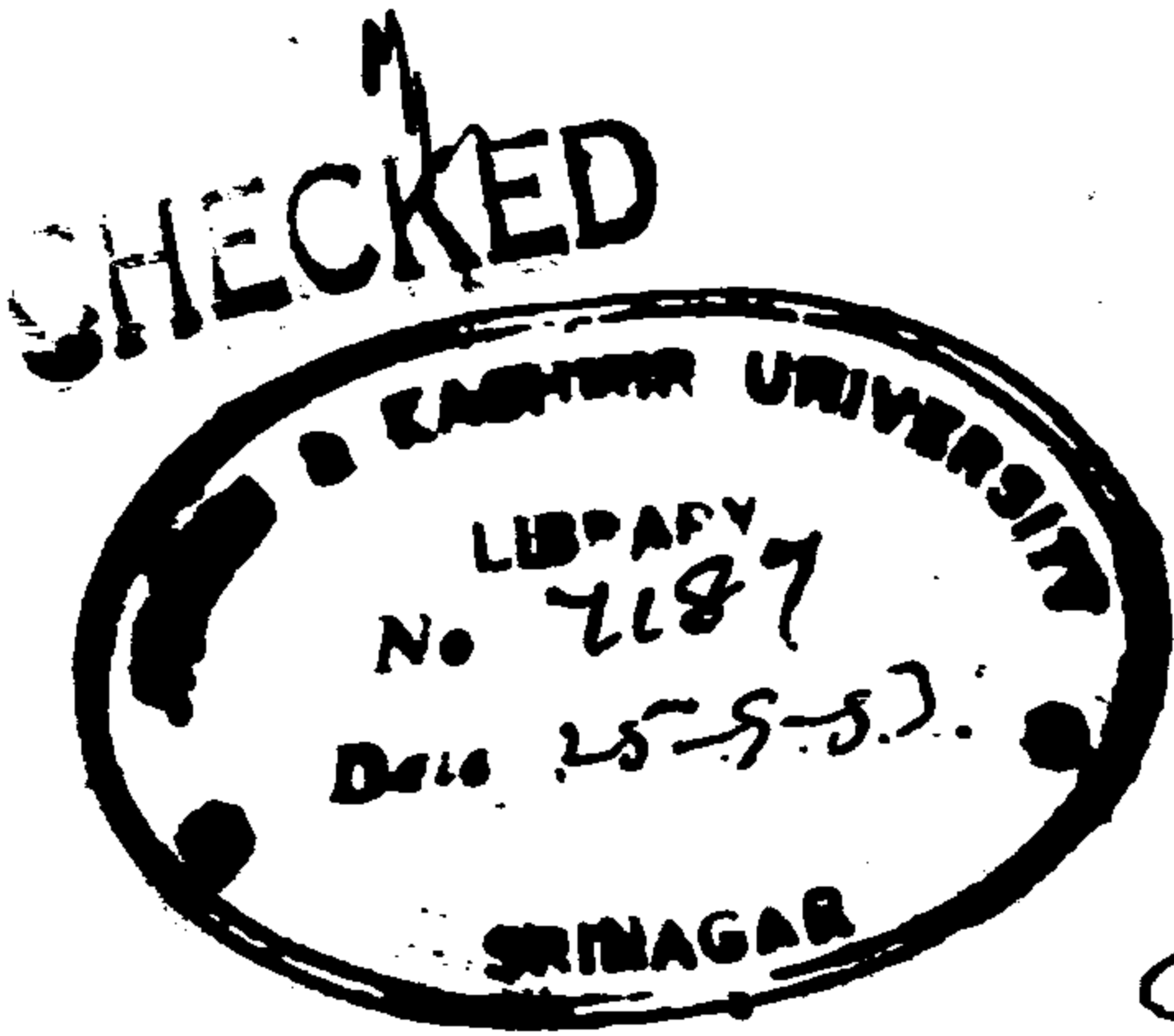




# EDUCATION BEFORE VERDUN

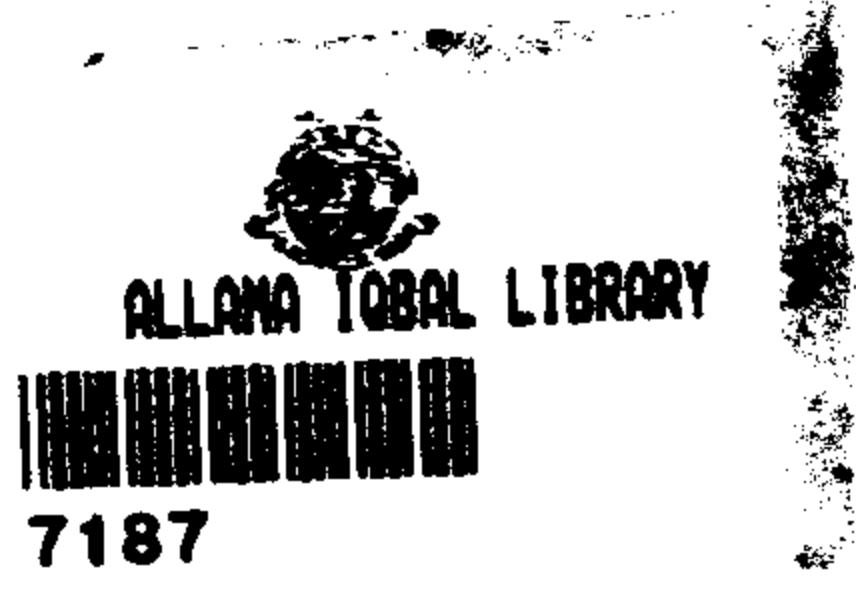
EDUCATION BEFORE VERDUN

*Translated from the German by*  
**ERIC SUTTON**



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# EDUCATION BEFORE VERDUN

*By*  
ARNOLD ZWEIG

*Author of*  
"THE CASE OF SERGEANT GRISCHA"

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BOOK ONE  
IN THE WOODS





## CHAPTER I: A WATER-TAP IS TURNED OFF

SINCE the middle of May the battle had come to a deadlock. Now, half-way through July, its formless shape still rolled over the low ground between Fleury village and Fort Souville, bloated and beyond all human compass, a swaying, heaving mass of explosions, swaths of acrid smoke, clouds of dust, pulverized earth, and shattered stone and brick-work, riddled through and through by steel splinters and whistling bullets. At night, cloven by the flash and roar of gunfire, the rattle of machine-guns, the crash of hand-grenades, the shouts and cries of lost and stricken men; by day, the dust of the bayonet attack, the sweat of the attackers clambering out of their trenches, the ever-increasing hordes of dead and wounded, swelled the turmoil. And not here alone; on the right and left banks of the Meuse, north and south of the Somme, among the southern spurs of the Alps, and in the Bukovina, for a fortnight the locked struggle had swung back and forward; out here its deadliest work was done, in the wreckage and upheaval of a once smiling countryside; and yet, since the end of February, it had covered no more than ten kilometres of French soil from end to end, and at most twenty-five kilometres in breadth. But on that field French and Germans had each left sixty thousand dead; nor were they the last. Incessantly, by day and night, the Germans hurled their grey masses forward to the attack; like an elastic band, the French gave ground and then sprang forward once again; and when they yielded, they always left a number of their men wounded or prisoners in the hands of the attackers. The earth lay like a yellow-stained, blood-soaked disk, over which the merciless blue heaven

hung like an inverted mouse-trap, so that humanity might not escape the torments of its own brutality.

A troop of French prisoners, escorted by Bavarian infantrymen, was marching along the main road from what had once been the village of Azannes, to a still surviving railway station called Moirey. It is ill to march between fixed bayonets; it is ill to be captured by an enemy who has shown by his invasion of Belgium and France that he holds human life, his own and his enemy's, so cheap. In Germany the people were known to be starving; in Germany prisoners of war were maltreated, and the laws of civilization were ignored; at least, all the newspapers said so. It was wretched luck to have fallen into the hands of the Germans just at the eleventh hour, just before the Germans would have to throw in their hand here, in the face of the Franco-British onslaught on the Somme. Still, thought the Frenchmen, they had escaped from that hell's cauldron with whole limbs, and if they behaved themselves, they would survive a few months' imprisonment, revolting as it was to be led away like a herd of cattle. Behind them lay the gashed and ruined valleys and woodlands, the heights of the Meuse, and the slopes towards Azannes. But here the earth was still unwounded; to the right beneath them flowed a little stream, and yonder rose the green rounded hills of the Lorraine countryside. But—oh for a drink! Those marching men of the Fourth Infantry of the Line, in their blue-grey cloaks or tunics, steel helmets or twin-peaked caps, were tormented by dust and thirst.

At a turn in the road, on the left of it, they came upon two large troughs, into each of which gushed a runnel of clear water, where some German Army Service Corps men were washing their pots and pans. The Frenchmen looked up and stiffened, and they quickened their pace. The Bavarian escort knew what thirst meant, and would give them time to drink or fill their canteens. After all, the soldiers of both armies were only enemies on the battlefield;

besides, it was common knowledge among the French that the Army Service Corps were noncombatant labour battalions, Landsturm men too young or too old for service in the field, quite harmless folk.

A large hut camp reached up the slope, black against the blue sky, with a flight of steps leading down to the dusty road. More and more men ran down them, curious to see the prisoners; it was, moreover, the midday interval for dinner. Well, all the more hands to help them quench their thirst. In an instant a blue-grey mass of men clustered round the troughs; tanned, bearded faces were uplifted, dozens of arms outstretched, cups and saucepans, and even faces, plunged into the translucent pools that gurgled and glittered at the bottom of the troughs. French water tasted very good to those parched throats which gulped it down for the last time for a very long time. The A.S.C. men promptly grasped the situation; they filled their cooking-pots and carried them down the line; German and French tin or aluminium clinked in amity; and the dark tweed tunics were enclosed in a mass of blue-grey overalls.

"Now then," shouted the N.C.O. in charge of the escort, "get a move on there!" This halt for refreshment was quite out of order, but his voice did not sound wholly serious. No one is in a hurry to get back to his unit at the front, when that unit is dug in near Douaumont. Slowly, as their thirst was quenched, the prisoners drew away from the spring, dried their dripping beards, and formed up in the centre of the road. A light had come into their eyes. Two years of war had implanted a certain mutual respect and even sympathy in the Germans and the French. It was only in the hinterland of the lines of communication that numerous persons set themselves to foster hatred and fury so that the war-weariness of the human material should not gain ground.

A private in the Army Service Corps, whose black and shining beard made him recognizable from a distance, was glad to see one of his N.C.O.'s, Karde by name, a book-



seller from Leipzig, offer a cigar to the Bavarian, hold out a lighter, and talk to him in Saxon. Filling a bucket of water, Bertin made his way through the throng, hailing two of his comrades, by name Pahl and Lebede, as he passed, and trotted to the far end of the column, where the prisoners were trying vainly to elbow their way through the forward ranks. Like a herd of strange and yet familiar creatures, they craned their drawn, tanned faces out of their loosened collars, hurling guttural curses and entreaties at the men in their way. And a light of gratitude came into their eyes as they saw Bertin and his two friends approach.

"Make way there," cried Bertin, returning once more from the spring with a field kettle in one hand, and balancing a filled saucepan-lid in the other. Danger had appeared; on the hill above the hutments stood a group of officers watching the scene. The corpulent Colonel Stein, his great belly overhanging his breeched legs; on his right, his adjutant, Lieutenant Benndorf, Acting Captain, and on his left, Quartermaster-Sergeant Grassnick, and, at a respectful distance, Acting-Sergeant Glinsky cast disapproving looks at the commotion below. The colonel pointed indignantly with his riding-whip at the dripping faces as they were lifted from the troughs. How long had this been going on? Three or four minutes? Not one of these four missed a single detail of the scene.

"What the hell's all this?" snapped the colonel. "Who told them they could stop for a drink? Let 'em go and wet their snouts somewhere else." He laid a hand on his moustache and shouted down the hill: "Sergeant! Forward march!"

Colonel Stein was commandant of the Steinbergquell ammunition park, which extended up the hillside; Lieutenant Benndorf was his adjutant; Herr Grassnick was merely in command of the labour company attached to the park. All three men had fought at the front in 1914 and had then been wounded (Benndorf still walked with a stick

and limped) and had to make good in their present jobs. So the colonel could expect obedience.

But the human voice obviously did not carry very far in the open air and without a favourable wind. The colonel's order at first produced no result, although this was a violation of the laws of nature. Then Sergeant Glinsky dashed forward, his great hindquarters rocking briskly as he ran, flung himself half over the balustrade, and roared: "Stop that! Fall in there, and get on!"

He knew the right tone to use, did Glinsky. The Bavarian N.C.O. felt unconsciously for the hilt of the bayonet at his belt. But alas, his eye caught the glint of shoulder-straps up above—or the Prussian pig would have heard a few genial remarks in broad Bavarian. So he swung round abruptly and rapped out: "Fall in there."

Prisoners do well to understand even what they do not understand, and a few men of the escort could speak a little broken French. Slowly the front files moved forward. The A.S.C. men pushed their way through the throng of prisoners to get the rear files a drink, while the column quietly reformed.

Colonel Stein flushed purple. Those men below were thwarting the intention of his order. At Moirey station down in the valley, trucks, which looked like tiny toys, were rattling up to carry the prisoners to the rear, and would be expected back at once with a consignment of gas ammunition; plenty of time for the prisoners to get a drink at the station. "Stop that at once!" he shouted. "Sergeant, turn off the water!" Everyone in the park knew the brass taps by the fodder bin that controlled the flow from the two leaden spouts, Glinsky hurried off at once.

The A.S.C. men standing by heard this order with indignation, indifference, or a grin; but it struck at one man's heart. Bertin paled beneath his black beard. He did not remember the water-tap on Moirey station; and he seemed to suffer in his own person the torment of passing that



spring without a drink. He had just filled his cooking-pot. He really ought to have emptied it out on to the road, as some of his comrades were doing, even that kind-hearted little man Otto Reinhold, or Pahl the compositor. But Bertin knew that there were still several thirsty men in the rear ranks. At that moment, with three Bavarians behind them, they were almost abreast of the troughs. No one would now dare to fill their cups or their hollowed hands. "Sorry, the taps are turned off," said Lebede of the A.S.C., in private life an innkeeper, pointing to the spouts that were just running dry. "Well, I'm damned," growled Halezinsky, the gas mechanic; "and it calls itself a man." With a shrug of his shoulders he displayed his empty field-kettle to the rear ranks of the departing column.

Bertin's cooking-pot was of aluminium, battered and soot-blackened without, but spotless white within, and now full of precious water. He moved down the marching column, doling out the water as he went—only too conspicuous by reason of his black beard and his unruffled movements. To one gunner, who had stretched out his hollowed hands with torment in his eyes, he handed the lid full of water, and he held the cooking-pot to another's lips. "*Prends, camarade,*" said he; and the gunner took the pot, drank his fill as he marched on, and handed back the pot. Bertin, a budding barrister, intends, if nothing should prevent him, to grow to be an old or at least an elderly man, but never in his life will he forget the look that met him from those brown eyes, set in a sallow face blackened by gun-smoke, and dark and drawn with exhaustion. "*Est-tu Alsacien?*" said the Frenchman to the German. Bertin smiled. A man had to be an Alsatian to behave decently to a French prisoner. "No," he replied in French, "I am a Prussian." And he waved farewell. "But for you the war is over." "*Merci, bonne chance,*" answered the other, and marched away.

But Bertin stood while the A.S.C. men slowly made their way up the stairway, and with shining eyes and a glow at

his heart he watched the blue-grey backs fade into the distance. If these men were now packed off to Pomerania to work on the land, they would know they were not going to be devoured alive. What he had done he both could and would defend. Nothing much would happen to him. He needed only to lie low in his hut for the next quarter of an hour or until he had to go on duty. In a pleasant after-thrill of emotion he climbed the wooden stairway, his cooking-pot, from which Frenchmen had drunk, dangling clean and shining from a bent finger. Plunged in his own thoughts he did not notice the long look of astonishment with which Pahl the compositor watched him as he passed.

But Pahl did not stop him, not wishing to be seen about with Bertin just then. Time and again he had taken him for a spy, who hung on to the workers in the company so as to listen to their talk and inform against them. But this man was certainly no spy. Far from it; he was the very pattern of plain folly. If Wilhelm Pahl knew anything about Prussians, there would be something coming to this fellow who appeared to regard the prospect with indifference. But Pahl the compositor, with the air of a large unwieldy gnome, with his long arms, short neck, and small light-grey eyes, felt far from indifferent as he watched the man who had acted as his heart bade him—with Prussians looking on.

## CHAPTER II: STAND-TO

WHILE the men were still at work on the afternoon of that memorable day, an order rang out over the great ammunition park, with its piles of shells, turfed ramparts, and array of huts and tents: "Six o'clock—stand to!" Stand to? And why? In the last fortnight there had been four such inspections—boots, underclothes, drill overalls, tunics and neck bands. This huge labour company—its nominal strength was five hundred—had long been the laughing-stock of the gunners, sappers, signals and railwaymen in the neighbourhood, for their habit of aping the airs of the parade ground. They were known to be orphans of the army, elderly orphans doing excellent work, and treated like silly recruits on the very soil of France; they provided a pleasant circus, admission free. Among the trucks and the field railway lines, the shell dumps and the cartridge tents, there was much cursing and indignation.

"Stand-to," in the crisp phraseology of the army, means the formal assemblage of a body of men on the barrack square. Every man that can stand upon two legs must be there, even the clerks from the orderly room, and the light cases from the sick quarters. And so, at ten minutes to six punctually, the company, drawn up horse-shoe fashion in three ranks, filled the open space in the centre of the hutments. The ceremony of numbering off was over; every man was present with the sole exception of the officer in command, who had not yet arrived. Although the men had been most carefully placed according to their height, from the gigantic Hildebrandt on the extreme left of the first line to Vehse, Strauss, and Naumann II, the small



men on the extreme right, their appearance fell short in one most important regard which it was beyond Quartermaster Grassnick's powers to remedy: the men's tunics, which ruined the picture. Crudely cut *litevkas*, dark grey with red facings—dating from the early days at Küstrin; then a few biscuit-coloured garments made of serge for military officials. In Serbia these had been reinforced by a consignment of infantry tunics, of a dirty grey hue, and much reddened at the seams by frequent delousings. Last of all, at Rosenheim, on the journey to Verdun, the depot produced a few dozen green artillery tunics with black badges. At work and on the march all this was of no consequence, but it was hardly fair to venture on parades with such a variety of garb. More than half a million German men were walking about in this fashion—Land-sturm without weapons, workmen, tradesmen, and intellectuals; physically half-fit, with a smattering of military drill, helots to the fighting units; sham soldiers, objects of scorn and pity, and yet, at the same time, picked troops indispensable to the conduct of the war.

“Company—’tention! Eyes—right!”

The company stiffened. Quartermaster Grassnick, known among the men as Panje of Vranje from the little Serbian mountain town in which he had lived his best days, strolled nonchalantly towards them. The company tailor had done everything possible to turn him into an officer. His tunic sat faultlessly against the line of his back, the high grey cap with its silver cockade was poised impressively above the red face, and his shoulder-straps looked almost like those of a genuine lieutenant. But in the eyes of the officers he was only a step above a sergeant, and he lived in the chilly void somewhere between the promoted ranker and the master class. “Stand at ease!” he rasped out; “and attend to me, all of you.” He glanced over some reports, took a printed sheet from the hands of Herr Glinsky, to whom it had been handed with obsequious rigidity by Sperlich the orderly-room clerk, and read out

the contents; it was a Corps order from the Fifth Army, to the effect that Alsatian deserters had betrayed the great attack on May 5, as had now been confirmed by French prisoners. The need for strict discretion was accordingly impressed on everyone, in conversation, in railway carriages, and in letters home.

The company listened with blank faces. The French were of course too dumb to notice that the German army had the habit of laying birthday presents at the feet of its royal commanders, in the shape of successful attacks and conquered trenches; and that the Crown Prince had been born on May 6 nobody on the other side was of course aware. And so deserters, and especially Alsatian deserters, were needed to warn General Pétain of forthcoming attacks. Two Alsations were serving in the company, a young man and an older one, both good at their work and popular with their comrades; so that the reference to "Alsatian traitors" sounded especially tactful. The Prussians had always been paragons of tact. However, Panje of Vranje's snarled exhortations seemed to be drawing to an end, God help him, Amen.

But Herr Grassnick had not yet finished. "I am sorry to say," he continued, his hands quivering with excitement, "that a most astounding occurrence took place in my company today. Private Bertin, step out thirty paces from the line, forward march!" A shock ran through the company, just as when horses or dogs prick up their ears. And that movement meant: "Hullo, now we're in for it." A vast entity of five hundred hearts is very sensitive to honour and to shame, and in certain circumstances each individual may stand for the whole. It was a second or two before Bertin understood. He was unprepared for being picked out of the throng of his companions like a frog skewered on a stork's beak. But a soldier has to be prepared for everything, as Herr Grassnick was about to make him understand.

"Can't you hear?" he trumpeted, in the heavy stillness

that commonly precedes an act of punishment. "By the rear—march!"

With the obedience of a well-trained dog Bertin turned, stepped in a wide half-circle round the right wing of his, the third line, and stood breathing heavily, once again in his place. "Private Bertin, step forward thirty paces—march!" In his neatly blackened boots the victim again shot forward and at thirty paces took up a position to the half right of the company commander. Grassnick surveyed him wryly, looked up him and down, and rapped out: "About turn!" and the soldier swung abruptly round. The sweat was running down his spectacle glasses, and the blood was perhaps throbbing in his eyes. All about him stood the company like three half-finished walls of a room, light grey, dark grey, greenish grey, and blue, rank on rank of them, topped by a line of reddened faces shining in the sunlight. It was painful to stand in such a concentration of looks; however, there was no help for it. Why hadn't he had that great bulbous black beard of his shaved off, as Karl Lebede had suggested? Well, he must pay for his obstinacy. Not that he cared much for the fellow's abuse. By military as well as human law what he had done was right. To comfort the prisoner and give the thirsty to drink was enjoined by the Bible. A man who was at one with himself, with his own inner moral law, need fear no consequences. None the less he could not control a faint trembling at the knees, fortunately concealed by his baggy trousers.

"This man," bellowed Herr Grassnick, with an elaborate snarl, "this man was not ashamed to give a French prisoner water from his own cooking-pot, though the colonel had expressly forbidden it. I leave it to each one of you to describe such conduct as it deserves. A man of his kind is a disgrace to the company."

So he was to be publicly sacrificed, thought the black-bearded private. The skin of his forehead and nose slowly turned to a greyish yellow, and his ears, which were rather



prominent, felt as they used to feel in his schooldays when old Kosch, his master, tweaked them. But his own conscience was clear, and he felt something like sympathy for the superior officer on his left. A town clerk from Lausitz disguised as an officer, but nowhere recognized by the master class as one of themselves, he stood there rapping out his reprimands, between portentous pauses, looking and talking exactly like the man he was. Yes, he heard the man croak, such behaviour was the worse on the part of an educated man, from whom better things might have been expected. What a shocking example for the others! Fortunately he was not typical of the company as a whole. The spirit of the company was good, as was well known in high places. So no drastic measures would be needed to abolish such occurrences once and for all.

Can an occurrence be abolished, thought Bertin? But he breathed more freely. A couple of inquisitive gunners from the park personnel were sardonically eyeing the labour company's performance. A light breeze was blowing from the west, laden with the scent of hay. Beyond the stream, where a number of emaciated artillery horses were being nursed back to health in a large tent, the drivers were cutting the tall sweet grass in the meadows for fodder against the winter. Bertin felt quite bewildered by this mirage of a peaceful world, edged and framed by the boom and flash of the artillery duel beyond the horizon. So these were the preoccupations of his superiors within sight and sound of Verdun. Why should he let himself be engulfed by such rubbish? There he stood, a solitary figure, black-haired and pallid, heels together, hands against the seams of his trousers, while the concluding remarks rattled down upon his head. He was, no doubt, aware that he deserved to be brought before a court martial. But as his conduct had not hitherto given cause for complaint, he would be let off with a reprimand and had better take care for the future. "Fall in!"

It might have been worse, thought the company, and

Bertin thought so too as he scuttled back like a terrier released to his place in the line between the good-natured Otto Reinhold and Pahl, the compositor. Reinhold nudged him and covertly grinned.

“Company—’tention! Dis—miss!”

Four hundred and thirty men swung round and clattered off to enjoy their evening’s leisure. No one wasted a word over what had just taken place. There were underclothes to wash, trousers to patch, supper to eat, letters to write, or games to play; the evening was before them; they were men and they were free. At a rather slower pace than most, Bertin made his way back to the hutments, feeling a little shaken. He would lie down for half an hour and then take his beard to barber Naumann (Bruno). It was a great deal too conspicuous—*basta*. From among the N.C.O.’s still gathered in a group, Herr Glinsky’s expressionless, bulging eyes marked him as he went. To the right above the hills at Kronprinzeneck, and on the left before Romagne, hovered the great sausages of the captive ballons, burnished and golden in the evening light.



### CHAPTER III: THE GLIMMER

THE July night sweltered above the hut of the third section, in which some hundred and thirty men slept after their toil. In three layers, one above another, on wire netting and sacks stuffed with wood fibre, they tossed and grunted, sweated and scratched, without awakening. The company was very lousy. From the great delousing establishment at Rosenheim they had emerged as clean as newborn babes, and before they took possession of these filthy huts, they carried out a thorough spring cleaning and removed cart-loads of their predecessors' rubbish. But the yellow lice sat patiently in the seams of the yellow sleeping-sacks, biding their time; and now their time had come. Lice, like superior officers and Fate, are beings of a higher order; you may struggle against them, but you must, to a more or less degree, come to terms with them at last.

The great hut, in which not a glimmer of light was visible from without, was aired by ventilators in the roof, which Dr. Bindel, a civilian doctor in uniform, had had installed by the company carpenters on the representations of Private Bertin and Sanitary Corporal Schnee. A civilian might well have thought that no one could sleep in such a place and wake up refreshed. But he would be wrong. It was quite possible to sleep in it, as was proved by the example of a hundred and thirty men, and the rats that scurried along the gangways proved it too, for they awakened no one unless they actually bit a man's toes. But they did not much frequent the upper world, preferring to remain beneath the hut, where they felt more secure.

At two places in the great room there was a glimmer of light. Guarded by a tunic, an overcoat, and a knapsack,

a stearine cartridge, stuck on the bottom of a tin box, burned beside Private Bertin's head as he lay reading. About four men away and one story higher lay Pahl, the compositor, smoking a cigar. This he was doing as an aid to thought, and the subject of his meditations was mainly Private Bertin.

His comrade below was reading, not because he wanted to read. He was intent upon the proof sheets of a book. That evening the field post had brought him the first galleys of a new book of his which had just been printed in Leipzig. He had shown his comrade Pahl, who was in the trade, the broad-margined columns, set in fine type by a distinguished firm of printers. He had only the evenings and the nights in which to look through the text for misprints, and make corrections in the margin by means of that alphabet of signs which has become an age-long tradition of the printer's art. After that foolish performance of the afternoon he had indeed doubted whether he could concentrate his mind. But as a similar package would now reach him every day he had decided to make the effort. The dealings of authors with commas and colons, and their keen eye for repetitions, was only too well known to Pahl. He commended Bertin for not neglecting his craft, though most of his time and energy were claimed elsewhere. The Germans were reading a great deal at the moment, more especially the work of the younger authors; not for a century, he said, had there been such interest in new writers. His novel, *Love at Last Sight*, had suddenly been re-printed that spring in a handsome new edition, and the resulting royalties would be very welcome to his wife. So much had Pahl the compositor learned from conversations over supper. The technical side of book production interested him not a little; the familiar names of the various types, the question whether hand or machine composition was the better, and the actual process of proof correction. But he was still more interested in the author, though for quite arbitrary and very special reasons. He lay

puffing at his cigar, meditating on Bertin's capacity to survive the trial of strength for which he seemed to be destined. Sergeant Böhne, a postman in civil life, who still retained something of the postman's affability, and was well disposed to the Party, had, before they went to bed, given him, Pahl, some hint of what was going to happen next day. Pahl's thoughts proceeded slowly and step by step. Since he had watched Bertin standing alone in the middle of the assembled square, a target for Grassnick's objurgations, much had come before his mind. Karl Lebede had been right—Bertin had had his beard shaved off just a few hours too late; trust an innkeeper for knowing his fellow-men. But a compositor's deliberations are not to be despised either; his exact knowledge of the social order provides him with an equally exact knowledge of its military counterpart.

In his view the end and aim of the social order is the provision of a constant and sufficient supply of human labour at the lowest possible wage, on such terms that the worker may get no share in profits, nor sell the products of his skill, and shall yet devotedly serve his masters' interests. To this end, in time of peace, various conditions had to be created and maintained. In time of war, these were combined in highly effective fashion; any man who failed to do a full day's work was put into the trenches with the prospect of a hero's death. Pahl, having grasped the situation in good time, had successfully evaded all attempts to claim him or, in other words, to get him back to his newspaper plant at home. He had refused, on the plea of consideration for his married comrades. But, in point of fact, he had carefully estimated which form of compulsion was the more irksome, and had preferred the relatively greater freedom of a labour battalion to the slavery of the newspaper plant. Nor would he bear a hand in the loathsome task of manufacturing lies to help prolong the war.

Wilhelm Pahl regarded himself as essentially the product of the thrust and counterthrust of social strata. He had



been born into the world with an ungainly body and a misshapen face; that was fate, though possibly a little mountain sunshine, orthopædic exercises, easier circumstances, and a little more care on the part of the community, would have improved his physical equipment. As one of the joiner Otto Pahl's six children he went to the elementary school, a Royal Prussian elementary school at Schöneberg. The lad's ability soon attracted notice, and he might have gone far, if easier circumstances or a little care on the part of the community had encouraged his gifts for thought and learning. But as a son of Pahl, the joiner, his schooling ended at his fourteenth year, and his master's recommendation could find him nothing better than an apprenticeship in a printing works. As he could not become an explorer or a naturalist, he soon began to reflect on the basis of his own existence. He could not alter his parents' circumstances; so he decided to join those who were planning the reconstruction of society. He went to the school of the workers' party; he became a conscious element in a mass to which, by constant pressure from the masses, the future would belong. To keep the mass under control society made use of the mass itself; every year, in Germany and elsewhere, it put hundreds of thousands of the non-possessing classes into uniform and drilled them, continuing the work of the schools, so that they might be used against their own interests and prepared to shoot themselves down in the persons of their fellow-workers. In time of peace this was no more than a possibility; in time of war it became a hideous, infuriating reality. Whence it will be seen that Compositor Pahl hated the army and all that it stood for, and despised war as a product of the abysmal stupidity of the masses. At the same time he understood it: it was indispensable to society in the struggle for world markets; in times of tension it diverted attention from within to without, and led the armies of the proletariat, who might rise at any time against the governing classes, to mutual slaughter on the field of honour.

Compositor Pahl closed his eyes. He wished he could get to sleep, but as yet he could not. His brain was too greatly stimulated by his own logic. Militarism grows nervous at the faintest indication that the proletariat is beginning to see through the artful differentiation created by uniform and language. Those in authority must have formed an odd notion of that harmless sheep Bertin. That solemn performance of a few hours before served to show that they proposed to use him as an example to forbid any fraternization with French prisoners. Bertin had merely acted out of the kindness of his heart, from a decent, if rather sentimental feeling of comradeship, and he had no notion of damning war as an institution. He was far too typical a product of high school and university to do any such thing. Karl Lebede had soon guessed as much. All respect to Karl Lebede.

But now "comrade" Bertin would find himself forced to become a real Comrade. That was quite clear to Wilhelm Pahl, and it was really to make sure of that result that he was now lying awake. Sergeant Böhne had told him in confidence that a fresh order would be issued in the morning. Two long-range guns had become embedded in a ravine between Fosses wood and the Poivre ridge; they had to be removed next day before a new (Bavarian) howitzer battery could occupy the position. Now working parties for the front line were usually chosen from the sturdier men in the first and second sections, but tomorrow they were to be taken from the smaller and weaker men of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh sections, which had hitherto been working in the cartridge tent. Today's culprit, Bertin, belonged to the tenth section, Pahl to the ninth, and the N.C.O.'s who were to go with them were the three section leaders. "Do you spot anything, Pahl?" said Böhne with a laugh. "If you were an old soldier, you would." Wilhelm Pahl was not an old soldier, but he did spot what the intention was. This was an instance of mass punishment. It was a not uncommon practice in

the Prussian army to visit the misdemeanour of an individual on the whole section to which he belonged, so as to turn his fellows against him, and gradually make life as unpleasant for him as possible. It was for that purpose that Herr Glinsky had called up the N.C.O.'s after the stand-to.

In normal circumstances—in a business, for instance—punishment effaced the fault. In abnormal circumstances, as for instance in the army of the class state, such punishment was the beginning of a martyrdom. Henceforward the victim would find himself in the wrong on every possible occasion; he would fall from one predicament into the next. It would be a gradual and possibly a slow process, but shock after shock would acquaint Private Bertin with the full bitterness of life. This was as certain as the connexion between propagation and coition. Hitherto he had got on pretty well in the company, according to his own account. His wish to be just an ordinary private in a labour battalion was part of his idealism, and idealism again, as Wilhelm Pahl was well aware, was one of the finest baits with which society prevented clever men from minding their own interests, and lured them into serving the ruling classes, without any reward but honour. The general assumption among the officers and men of that unit that a Jewish writer and a future barrister must be a Socialist, showed that they knew more about Private Bertin than he did himself, his destiny, and the significance of his own feelings and sense of solidarity. Deep down within himself Bertin knew all this too; but it was hidden from his consciousness as yet. Consciously, as he had often announced, he believed in the inevitability of wars, and in Germany's good cause. And as, in fact, the majority of the Party thought likewise, he could hardly be criticized for that. None the less all such young people are rightly and always suspect until their acts have proved their true allegiance. Still, this was a man that must on no account be allowed to slip.



There he stood, pilloried in the bright sunshine, a servant of the ruling class, solemnly doing the things that he was told to do. Education, as was once more made plain, was a powerful and important factor in life. Well, he would not want for education now. Glinsky, Grassnick, Colonel Stein, the whole military machine, would see to that. But he, Compositor Pahl, would give the right turn and point to such an education, as he was confident he could do. A man like Bertin might be of incalculable value to the working class. He was a writer who had had a new book published while the war was going on. Wilhelm Pahl had indeed read none of his writings, but he had heard him talk. The man could put his ideas into words in public, quite unperturbed by any audience. Pahl recalled certain discourses of his in Serbia while they were at work, to a company of highly critical A.S.C. men. But he, Wilhelm Pahl, was able to express his ideas only to one or two familiar friends; his consciousness of his ill looks, his crooked back and bull neck, his flattened nose and piggish eyes, made him incapable of appearing in public. And this was an essential for the advancement of the working class. The gifts of Bertin the barrister, combined with Compositor Pahl's ideas, would provide a truly effective instrument. Pahl's hatred, his indignation at the violation of justice, at its distortion into class justice by the structure of human society—if these feelings could be kindled in the heart of Comrade Bertin, if his careless courage, his contempt for personal danger, could be set in the right direction, much good work might be done. At present all the power was in the hands of the master class. They, who provided the officers, disposed of over seventy million Germans, their thoughts, their efforts, and their desires. Only idealistic sheep like Bertin could believe that they would ever willingly surrender that power. But the best means of wresting it from them was not a matter that need be settled that evening nor in the next few weeks. No, he, Wilhelm Pahl, would have plenty of time in which

to form his ideas on that subject in his own slow fashion. In any case he would not submit the question of the How and Why and Where to the decision of the Party majority. It was not for nothing that the company had given him the complimentary nickname of Liebknecht; on the subject of those who voted for the war credits he shared the views of that lonely figure, who had had to expiate his courageous attitude in the Reichstag and on the Potsdamer Platz on May Day by a term of imprisonment. In a few firms comrades had actually dared to strike, which was an encouraging sign. But at the moment the Verdun battle filled the stage, a considerable price was being paid for the hegemony of Europe, or rather, of the world.

Pahl's cigar was nearing its end, and he was now pleasantly tired; sleep would do him good, and sleep was at hand. Such were his "Thoughts in Wartime," rather different from those published by patriotic professors in the newspapers, one of which he had just consigned to the underworld for the delectation of the scurrying vermin in the great latrine. Incidentally, the huge forty-two a mile or so away, which roared so loud that the whole hut quivered, had been silent for two days. It was rumoured that a shell had burst in the barrel, and made an end of the gun and all its crew. They had no doubt been surprised when the shell, as large as an eight-year-old boy, burst in the barrel and shattered it, spitting forth steel and fire, without waiting until it reached the French lines. But what was the war but a gigantic undertaking on the part of the destruction industry, accompanied by extreme personal danger to all concerned. So a gun could be destroyed otherwise than by French airmen, who were growing more reckless every day. . . . There, the other had put out his light. The butt of Pahl's cigar dropped with a hiss into a tin of water. He shifted himself into the hollows of his sack of wood fibre, pulled up the blanket, and laid his head on his folded tunic. Bertin, he knew, used a grand india-rubber air cushion for that purpose. Well,



his nerves would need all the greasing they could get. For the first time Pahl was conscious of a certain dour sympathy for his comrade.

The snoring of the men seemed to have drowned the booming of the guns. Or were the guns silent? Had society muzzled their jaws once more? Were the printing-presses out yonder no longer pounding? Had the vast typesetting machine that was moulding so many thousands into the letters of a new alphabet in which the future should find expression suddenly ceased to rumble? The trams had stopped running down the main street of Schöneberg; it must be Sunday afternoon.

## CHAPTER IV: CHRISTOPH KROYSING

"EXCELLENT!" said Private Bertin next morning. The sunshine was flashing on the dew, and the march across country relieved Böhne's section from the loathed proximity of their superiors. Bertin had indeed reacted very differently ("Confound the fellow!") to this move towards the front from what Herr Glinsky and his like had expected. For him it was a trip into reality; he thrilled with joy at the prospect of experience at last. His whole being, as receptive as a thirsty sponge, reached eagerly forwards; something within him tugged at an invisible line. That morning he was all eye and ear and curiosity.

The Steinbergquell ammunition park, ensconced at the junction of the road from Flabas to Moirey station with that from Damvillers to Azannes, had several accesses to the front; the shortest led to Fosses wood through a village wrecked by artillery fire, with yawning chasms in its roofs and walls, named Ville. It was still very early; the level rays of sunlight followed the marching men, and the morning light gleamed on the leaves of a pear tree and on the washing that the signals and trenchmortar men had hung out to dry in the yards of their billets. All billets were cellars; Ville was a cellar town, packed with staff, technical troops, and infantry.

In a green valley into which they turned, when the road, now overtopped by hills, changed direction, they came upon the first dead, lying still under their rusty red tarpaulins, and guarded by a sapper in a steel helmet. For a moment the chatter of the marching men was silenced. Then they plunged into a green beechwood, and the fresh foliage of the treetops hung transparent against a shining

sky; a stream rippled and flashed down the valley; drivers were watering their unharnessed horses and carrying filled buckets swinging from broad shoulder-yokes up to the top of the slope, where they disappeared behind a row of black huts. The wood was almost undamaged by shell-fire, except that it had here and there been thinned and was traversed in many directions by paths, all leading upwards. As they advanced, more and more trees lay torn and truncated on either side of the gully, the red timber of the beeches clearly visible among a green welter of creepers, foliage, and brambles. Hazel bushes and wild cherries formed a thick undergrowth, and the tall, smooth, silver-grey trunks of the beeches were everywhere beset by dozens of small saplings, thrusting upwards to quench their thirst for light, and not to be choked by the spreading crests of their predatory elders. Shafts of sunlight slanted through the tangle, and the birds sang and twittered. When the gully forked to the south, the trees were suddenly transformed into lopped trunks, with the bark hanging down in strips; the white rock, split by shellfire, was everywhere laid bare; and round the edges of gigantic cavities swarmed, half trodden into the clay, a luxuriant growth of creepers and brambles. Later on, about eight o'clock, they crossed a high plateau, riddled by shell-holes like a colossal sieve, many of them as large as craters. A barren, tawny desolation, the ravaged land stretched southwards. On it, without warning, appeared sudden puffs of smoke, and a crashing detonation flung the little company into the nearest shell-holes. None of them knew their direction, nor whether they might not be taking cover on the wrong side. In that moment Bertin was aglow with exultation. For a man of twenty-seven his heart beat like a boy's, but perhaps that was just because he felt so ecstatic. They crawled on, and at the next explosion Bertin found himself beside Sergeant Böhne and Schulz, the laboratory orderly, who led the party. For the first time splinters and sods of earth whirled over the



heads of the startled A.S.C. men. When they mustered at the edge of the field, and advanced in spasmodic dashes between the explosions, all were found to be unhurt. But they looked pale enough when they came upon the light railway in the next ravine, which was there screened from sight by wire netting interwoven with foliage. At that moment the shells of the German counter-bombardment began to whistle and scream above their heads. Further down they fell in with a couple of gunners from a heavy battery who asked them with placid grins how they were enjoying the show. Bertin was almost ashamed of his comrades' blotched faces and pallid noses.

"Get a move on there!" shouted Sergeant Böhne, hustling his men down the scarred and pitted slope. Below them rode an artilleryman, scanning the ground at the edge of the wood, and then disappearing into a small screened group of trees. He plainly belonged to the battery that was due to take up position here. In the hollow, two long-barrelled guns rose into the air like the shafts of telescopes, with groups of diminutive men already bustling about them. The line of field railway came to a stop halfway down the covering ridge of hill; thence, down to the guns, a fresh line would have to be laid so that the barrel and mounting of the first gun could be hauled to the rear that night by the little locomotive. This was explained to Herr Böhne by a young Bavarian N.C.O. who had been waiting for their arrival. Bertin liked the look of the young man's tanned face and kindly eyes beneath the peaked cap. Plainly a volunteer of 1914, who in the course of twelve months had acquired the Iron Cross II, a wound, and his stripes. Bertin, who had spent some time at a South German university, thrilled at the young man's accent, which he found much more appealing than the Silesian of his own fellow-countrymen. The programme of work was simple enough: yonder were large stacks of rails, and while the Prussians lengthened the line as far as the guns, his men would be dismantling the great beasts

and taking the mountings out of their beddings. By mid-day the coast must be clear, or Franz would get them in the neck. He knew what he was talking about, as he and his men had been lying, ready to take cover, in the ruin up yonder known as Chambrettes farm. Every morning, Franz, who knew the lie of the land, knocked the line to bits; then his men crept out of their holes, laid fresh rails, and so the game went on. He had thirty men and two medical orderlies, as now and again a man stopped a bit of something if he did not duck in time. As he spoke, he laid a hand over his eyes and peered up at the captive balloon. By its pale hue the expert could tell that, owing to the ground mist and the dazzle of the morning sun, the observer was harmless for the present. So the work began; while part of the section levelled the ground with pick and shovel, the main body carried down the rails and fitted them together like a child's toy, fixing the iron sleepers into the earth with little clips. The slope of the hill above them looked yellowish and bleak: tufts of grass between the shell-holes, here and there a thistle, a Michaelmas daisy, or the leaves of a dandelion. The earth was strewn with steel splinters, which played havoc with the soles of boots. The place had been bombarded, thought Bertin, as he stood with the leading file shovelling away great clods of clay. The sun beat down upon these bent backs; tunics had long since been cast aside. Sergeant Böhne watched his men with side glances from his wrinkled eyes. He strutted up and down, swinging his walking-stick, well pleased with an expedition that might bring him the Iron Cross, and with his men's work, which progressed to the astonishment of the young Bavarian. Yes, thought Bertin, who heard them talking, Hamburg and Berlin workmen get a job done more quickly than most people. Was he mistaken, or did the young man with the blue and white badge stop purposely beside him? Or does a sudden liking suggest such fancies? Behind the working party a first and then a second truck was shunted

down with much clatter and grinding of brakes; in barely an hour they had reached the guns. To the accompaniment of much cursing the ponderous steel monster, barrel and mounting, stanchions, wedges, and timber baulks, was hoisted on the groaning trucks; then thirty men, straining at long cables, hauled them up the hill. The rope cut into every man's right or left shoulder; like slaves of the Chaldeans or Egyptians, the men panted up the slope, and on and to the station, which oddly enough was called Hundekühle, after a certain tramway halt in Berlin-Grünwald, near a well-known Sunday resort. Suddenly a lieutenant appeared with a camera and snapped the sweating columns strung out on their ropes like smoked fish on a line. Then the famous breakfast call of the labour battalions rang out—"Fifteen!" For a telephone message had reached the hut that trucks for the second gun would not be forthcoming that day. There would be time for a drink, a bite of food, and a cigarette.

A haze of heat shimmered over the broad ravine, its tawny rims outlined against the sky. "That's Fosses wood," Bertin heard the young Bavarian say, as he strolled round the gun positions in search of shade, and he followed with his eyes a comprehensive gesture of the other's left arm. Below him stretched a grey and shattered slope, dotted with the stumps of tottering trees, from whose split and riven timber, white or ochrous-hued, still sprouted small green leaves, and with some unhewn posts, scarred and gashed by shell-splinters and rifle bullets. Unexploded shells lay scattered among the vegetation or raised their round hindquarters to the light. Ancient roots thrust grey fingers into the vast shell craters; trees, flung lengthwise to the ground and raising great earth-umbrellas to the sky, were mouldering to death, their top branches long since trodden into the ground. The chalky rock, the dark upturned mould, and the leafage, still undaunted and luxuriant, painted destruction in three colours. In this place man had wrecked what nature had taken generations



to produce. Only in one or two sheltered corners of the escarpment, a tree or two still stood, dispensing shade.

Under one of them lay Bertin, with his head resting on his cap and his legs in a dry and crumbling shell-hole. Idly he watched the play of wind in the flickering leaves. How long would this remnant of nature and creation on the slope of Fosses wood endure in the moonlight and the sunshine? Those smooth green-flecked, pillared beeches? When the new battery arrived, this last fragment of vegetation would soon be hurled into the chaos of tree-trunks, earth, and undergrowth. Alas, said Bertin to himself; of the men that would also be destroyed he, oddly enough, did not think at all. A light westerly breeze carried to his ears the whistle and crack of shots, and the merciless tap-tap of a machine-gun. None the less, sun and shade and landscape meant something more, and something deeper, to a young man like Bertin, than shell-splinters and tetanus bacilli; his was an essentially musical nature, dependent on and responsive to impressions, sensations, and emotions. At the moment he was diverting himself with a stray cat, which had suddenly appeared in a blackberry bush. Its bottle-green eyes were set upon a sausage-end lying on a scrap of grease-soaked paper near Bertin's left hand, and exhaling a remarkably meaty, smoky fragrance. No cat that understands its business need ever starve in time of war. But here was a prize to stir all its feline greed; a leap, and a snap at the man's hand, the clutch of a claw at the sausage-end, and a dash up the toppling beech as far as its topmost branches. . . . But the cat, though now half wild, had been a house cat, and it knew all the wicked wiles of men. They no longer threw stones; something whipped through the air from a stick with a pointed end. She peered out undecided, her limbs now tense to spring and now relaxed, among the tangled undergrowth and brambles. How lovely she looked in her posed savagery. Bertin recalled all the cats that as a boy in Kreuzburg he had owned and lost—lost,

no one could ever tell how. (In Silesia cat-skins were held to be the best specific against rheumatism.) However, he thought perhaps he had better eat the sausage himself for his supper. He had fallen pretty low, he thought, to be wondering whether he should eat that odorous sausage-end or leave it to the cat. No, she should only get the skin; he reached out a sudden hand and flicked the paper round the sausage. The cat darted back in alarm and spat.

"That was a nasty shock for the poor beast," said a voice above him that he already knew, a pleasant young voice, and a pair of legs in grey green puttees dangled into the shell-hole opposite Bertin's legs. He stiffened involuntarily, for a sergeant is always a sergeant, and must be treated with respect even during a midday rest. By his watch the time was eleven, but by the sun it was noon, and noon it clearly was; those two young men seemed the only two human beings awake in all the world. The cat cowered three paces away, invisible between two roots as thick as a man's arm, grey and flecked with grey like the cat's own fur. The two young men eyed each other with approval. Didn't he want to lie down again, asked the other? Bertin said no. A man could sleep anywhere; here he wanted to be all alive, keep his eyes open, and smoke his after-dinner pipe. He produced a graceful object of meerschaum and amber, already filled, from his haversack; the Bavarian shielded the guttering lighter with his cap—a special cap, very neatly made; Bertin noticed the letters C.K. on the leather edging. Yes, this young man came of a good family, that was obvious from his parted hair, his broad forehead, his slender wrists and fingers. "And how did you get here?" said the Bavarian to the Berliner, and himself lit a cigarette. Bertin did not understand the question. "I'm here on duty," he said in astonishment. "What! just like anyone else? Can't they find any better employment for you?" "I don't like office air," said Bertin with a smile. "You'd sooner do



an outdoor job and get yourself photographed, eh?" retorted the other with an identical smile. "Just that," agreed Bertin; and the acquaintance was made. They introduced themselves to each other; the sergeant's name was Christoph Kroysing, and he came from Nürnberg. His vivid eyes were fixed on Bertin's face with a half-quizzical look. A brief silence followed in which a few metallic crashes—were they from Hill 300 or 378?—reminded them of the meaning of the time and the space in which they stood. Then young Kroysing shook himself slightly and asked in a level undertone whether Bertin would do him a service.

No one near by noticed the pair. The roots of a gigantic beech, stricken as though by a lightning flash, screened them like a wall. And neither of the two observed that the cat, familiar with the ways of foolish bipeds, had picked up the precious sausage-end, paper and all, and was carrying it away in its teeth.

Christoph Kroysing explained. For the last nine weeks he and his men had been living in the cellars of Cham-brettes farm, and it appeared that Captain Niggel, ex-tax-collector, and his orderly room, intended that he should stay there for ever. He had gone off to the war during his first term, he went on; he had been rather badly wounded and promoted, and had now been sent out to the Reserve Division because they needed every educated man they could get. In the autumn he was to take an officer's course, and by next spring he would have got his commission; but for the time being he had the misfortune not to see eye to eye with the way his fellow N.C.O.'s treated the rank and file. They had established their own kitchen and impounded all the best supplies: fresh meat and butter, sugar and potatoes, and above all beer, while noodles, dried vegetables, and bully beef were regarded as good enough for the men, though they were hard worked and got almost no leave. In this matter, said young Kroysing, the tradition of his family got between his legs. For a century past his

forebears had given high officials and magistrates to the kingdom of Bavaria, and where a Kroysing sat, there right and justice would be dispensed. So he committed the folly of writing a long letter of complaint to his uncle Franz, who was an important personage at the Military Railway Administration in Metz. The censorship was naturally very curious to know what a sergeant might have to say to a high officer of the M.R.A.; the letter went back to the battalion with orders that the writer should be brought before a court martial. When he heard that, Kroysing laughed. They had merely to ask, he would speak, and he would certainly not be at a loss for evidence. His brother Eberhard, however, who was with his sappers at Douaumont, did not share this view. He actually came over and spoke his mind over what he described as crass idiocy; not a man would dare to open his mouth when the court martial had the handling of them. He, in any case, could do nothing for Christoph, he observed before he departed; every man must get out of his own mess, and now, his, Eberhard's, post would be gone through with magnifying-glasses. They had been good friends as boys together, Eberhard was five years older than his junior, and always felt himself privileged to abuse him, as elder brothers usually do. But the company would not let the matter get as far as an inquiry. Their fear of that was plainly observable, and strangely enough the court martial did not assemble. "And so," concluded Kroysing, "they packed me off to Chambrettes farm. One day, they hope, Franz will send one over that will put the whole affair on the top shelf once for all. For the last nine weeks I've been looking at every single face that fetches up in this lousy hole. . . ."

Bertin sat, with the shadows of the beech leaves flickering over his face, but something within him laughed for joy. He was glad he had come. Here was a man about to be engulfed in villainy, and he could reach out a rescuing hand. "And what can I do?" he asked simply. Kroysing

eyed him gratefully; merely forward a few lines to his mother, which he would give him at their next meeting. "Your letters aren't suspected, are they? When you write home, put my letter in yours and ask them to drop it into a postbox at home. Then my mother will telegraph to Uncle Franz, and that will do the trick." "Right," said Bertin. "We shall soon know when we're coming along here again, someone seems to be raising his voice down yonder—do you hear?"

"Fall in!" came a roar from below. "Better not be seen together again. I'll write the letter at once. Thank you very much. I hope I may be able to do something for you one day." He shook Bertin by the hand, and his eyes, widely set, brown and boyish, shone; he laid a hand to his cap and vanished among the tree-trunks, nearly stumbling over the cat, now prowling about in the vain hope of another sausage-end.

Bertin stood up, stretched his arms, drew a deep breath, and threw a happy glance around him. It was a grand scene: the tree-corpses, the white shell-craters, the limestone, the fierce splinters of the high-calibre shells, stuck in the ground like serrated throwing-knives. He ran like a boy down to the solitary gun, where his comrades stood in their tunics and packs, while Sergeant Böhne was lining up the section for the return journey. Bertin had found someone like unto himself, he had made an ally, perhaps even a friend. . . . He laughed at the grumbles of his comrades, who said he had let them in for more trouble on the way back by going to sleep for so long. The day after tomorrow, when they came along here again, they would keep an eye on him all right. Ah, the day after tomorrow, thought Bertin, and stepped into his place to number off.

The Bavarian sergeant also lined up his men and, waving a hand in farewell, shouted: "See you the day after tomorrow." His greeting reached them all, but Bertin knew for whom it was intended.



## CHAPTER V: EVENTS SOMETIMES MOVE FAST

ABOUT the middle of the night Christoph Kroysing crawled out of his dug-out, straightened himself, and walked a few paces. His slim and boyish form stood out against the lighter sky. His hands were in his pockets, his belt was unfastened, and his head bare; a shock of hair, though still showing traces of the brush, hung almost over his right eye. He was completely inured to the Walpurgis night that howled above his head; steel witches hurtling to destruction, long-range guns rattling and rumbling like railway trains. Every four or five minutes metal tons from the heavy howitzers clove the air with a deafening gurgling roar. The scream and whistle of the small field guns was backed by the persistent boom of the fifteen-millimetre shells, which, as the main weapon of the army, curved steeply through the night air from three or four different types of gun. And, in response, came the crash and boom and clatter of the French seven-point-fives, the tens, the twenties, and the terrible thirty-eights, with which the impregnable Fort Marre spat at the flank of the German trenches and positions beyond the Meuse. There seemed to be a certain liveliness at the front that day. In the small sector that could be faintly discerned from Hill 344, behind Douaumont ridge, the fighting divisions had struggled to dislodge each other with hand-grenades, machine-guns, and cold steel, and the surge of that conflict had now begun to ebb. The Germans had again advanced a few paces between Thiaumont and Souville, but the French had held fast; German artillery was now hammering their positions,

and they in their turn were hammering the German artillery to get some respite for their infantry. It was the daily give and take of the front lines, and Christoph Kroysing often thought that the end would never come until the last Germans and the last French hobbled out of the trenches on crutches to exterminate each other with pocket-knives or teeth and finger-nails. The world had gone mad; only an orgy of madness could explain this frantic wallowing in blood and flesh and bones. The lessons they had learned at school about man as a reasoning being had now to be quietly interred as rubbish—together with the bearded gentlemen who had the audacity to instruct schoolboys, and deserved no better than to have their heads beaten in with human bones. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "God is Love." "The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." "It is sweet and glorious to die for the Fatherland." "Justice and law are the pillars of the State." "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Well, he had always been a man of good will, and here he was.

To get a view to the south and west involved an element of risk. In the circumvallation of the farm Kroysing knew of a small hole, a sort of seat, that he called his stage-box. Of course, in the bare minute that it took to scramble through the brickwork, he might be blown to bits; but never mind. He darted across, and was soon ensconced, laughing and panting in his lair.

The uncertain brilliance of the moonless starlit night grew more and more transparent, and the ear gradually began to locate all the manifold sounds of war. The ravines towards Douaumont lay under heavy fire. Rifle and machine-gun fire lashed the Poivre ridges. On the rubbish heap that had once been Louvemont red jets of flame shot up, vanished, and then came the detonation. Below him and beyond his vision, field kitchens, ammunition trucks, working parties with rolls of wire, posts, and

entrenching tools—horses, lorries, and men. Franz was growing lavish of his ammunition; yonder were dark-red bushes of fire breaking out in the valley to the left; about a hundred yards ahead, where nothing could be seen, a much frequented footpath led to Herbe Bois. Kroysing thought he could hear shrieks. This little war was continually inscribing its initials in human skin, using for that purpose fresh shell-splinters, which the nations so liberally provided. On the southern edge of Vauche wood, where the military road ran up to Douaumont, roared and flashed a chain of small volcanoes, constantly renewed, and over Douaumont itself, over the heads of brother Eherhard and his men, hung a great cloud of red haze that was never dispelled. The thunder, never stilled, of the furnace called Verdun. There the backbone of the army was ground to powder; there the red and green fire balls soared above the horizon, a gay firework display that intimated the infantry's agonized appeals for help. There shone the mild radiance of the white star shells of the French, as they swung slowly down to earth, providing so excellent a light for accurate rifle-fire. Kroysing knew them well; from the Chemin des Dames, from the Loretto heights, the sugar factory by Souchez, and all the doings of the war in 1914 and 1915, when he was still an infantryman and risked his body for his Fatherland. Now he felt more disposed to contemplation, and was very well content to be where he was in his little rat-ridden stage-box of shattered brick. The horizon, outstretched before him in a gigantic arc, flashed and flickered like summer lightning and then faded into blackness, and, distant as it was, the fury of the bombardment reached his ears but little diminished, out-thundered only by the roar of guns close by. The batteries of Fosses wood, and of Vavrille, were working at full strength; half-naked gunners, with men detailed to fetch and carry for them, observers in the trees, and telephonists at their apparatus; a night-shift in action.



He knew them all, those damned shell-blacksmiths. Tomorrow the new battery would be established close by, and draw the French counter-fire on to this placid valley. His heart ached for the scrap of woodland still left standing; and for every man that was there doomed to perish. And he felt sorry for himself, who at twenty-one had to recognize that human wickedness and its instinct for self-preservation were as active as the war, and even less to be evaded. There he leaned against the wreckage of a wall, his hair blown over his boyish face, his hands against his lean cheeks, half crouching and half sitting. Such was Verdun, thought he; it had changed but little in all these weeks, except that the front line had shifted slightly further forward; they had won no more ground than they could cover with their corpses. Such, too, was the Somme, where the French and the English had staged a similar fraud.

Suddenly there came a roar from Hill 344, followed by sharp red flashes against a background of white flame; perhaps his point of vantage was becoming a little unhealthy. But he would not go to sleep in such desolation of mind as he had done yesterday, haunted by the rabble who peered through his correspondence and read what he wrote to his father and mother. No, he had come to life again; there was marrow in his bones, and his head felt clear once more. Tomorrow or the day after, friend Bertin would come again. They had not reckoned with the fellow-feeling of the decent people in the army. The letter, which he had written that afternoon with his trusty fountain pen, already crackled in the tunic pocket above his heart; then, a few days during which he must be very careful; and from above a mighty hand would reach out and take him, Christoph Kroysing, from this rat-hole. For although the Gods had abdicated, and darkness had come upon the world, all over the German army there were men who would make no terms with injustice, and who would see red if it could be proved to them that immediately

behind the foremost trenches, baseness, selfishness, and treachery held sway.

The dew was falling heavily as he got up, his leg muscles aching; and how clearly the stars shone above his head. Was the same insane performance going on up above? Not a doubt of it. Matter and spirit were identical, above and below. In the half-light the rats, as large as lanky cats, scurried over the ground; he must really shoot a few dozen of them next day. Although they grew much fatter nearer to the front lines, they never deserted the ruins of the stables where they had been born.

Weary and heavy in the head, but his mind now quite at ease, Christoph Kroysing made his way back to the dug-out in which his comrades were snoring. The damp stonework stank; but from the letter that he felt in his breast pocket, as he undressed, came gentle wafts of comfort that soothed his nerves. And as he folded up his tunic, and laid his head upon it, as he did every night, young Kroysing smiled in the darkness.

Early next day Franz fired his usual morning salutation at the light railway; crashing detonations, hurtling splinters, a hail of steel and sods of earth. As soon as it was over, the Bavarians emerged from their rat-holes and inspected the damage. Two whole sections of the line had been smashed this time, and they blasphemed at Franz for all the work he let them in for. In the morning haze a French aeroplane circling high overhead disappeared eastwards.

A wonderful summer day, thought Christoph Kroysing. He felt good that day, better than he had done for a long while. Blue sky—an air that tingled in his limbs. He might first pay a visit to Hundekehle station and see whether they had sent up the trucks to remove the other gun. He made his way cautiously up the hill along the line of rails, sometimes jumping from one sleeper to the next. Franz had the habit of sending over a parting reminder of his presence. Crumps they were called, because



they were there before the shot was heard, and this part of the ravine was rather too well placed for artillery observation. But Kroysing felt equal to any risk that day. There was some advantage in having had to stay in a position for sixty successive days; a man learned every inch of the land whether he wanted to or not. For the first time too he noticed flowers once more growing at the edges of the shell-holes; lilac cuckoo-flower, summer cornflowers, and red poppies like a swaying fleck of blood.

At Hundekhele the hot air was shimmering above the corrugated iron. There were no trucks of any sort; so the second gun would not be fetched that day; he felt rather sorry. Half a dozen infantrymen were sitting asleep in the shade of the station shed together with a junior M.O., with their backs against the metal and legs outstretched, covered with dust and earth from head to foot. Their sprawling attitudes expressed a more than human exhaustion; inside sat a young lieutenant, equally worn out but under the necessity of remaining awake and responsible, and wondering how he was to get two machine-guns and his men's baggage to the rear. Then he stepped out into the harsh sunlight, blinked as he eyed the Bavarian sergeant, offered him a cigarette, and asked for news. He decided that he ought to wake his men; if they went sound asleep, it would be difficult to rouse them again; and as long as they were in that cursed neighbourhood, they must be awake and ready to scatter and take cover at any sign of a bombardment, though at the moment they were enjoying a little peace. They came from Poivres ridge and had been relieved about two that morning; the main body had taken the usual route through Burabant but had been scattered by artillery-fire; he, Lieutenant Mahnitz, and his junior M.O., Dr. Tichauer, were agreed that it was far better to trip over shell-holes, and make their way across country to the rear, and keep clear of the heavy stuff, especially as they were looking forward to a spot of leave. He laughed a genial laugh. They had

had a tough time, but things would be easier now that both Germans and French were busy over the Somme battle. They had richly earned a bit of rest, and just at the moment they felt they could do very well with a cup of hot coffee.

Christoph Kroysing at once ventured to invite the officer and his men to some freshly-made bean coffee. Much relieved that his hint had been taken, the lieutenant detailed a corporal, who had gone to sleep again, to take the baggage and the two guns by the next empty train to Steinbergquell park and there await further orders. Then they moved off, lumbering down the line of rails with aching feet, and talking in undertones. Perhaps they would get a bit of a wash among the labour battalion; in any case they would pick up some breakfast. Their careless stride, their stained and faded uniforms, expressed the utter familiarity of the seasoned soldier with the conditions of these zones; from time to time they stopped and pricked their ears, awaiting the unexpected. It was half-past eight in the morning, and Franz could not see very much from his captive balloon, but caution is the mother of the porcelain box, as the phrase goes in the army. Sergeant Kroysing would go on ahead, to see that the coffee was ready, and the Hessian lads—they were Hessians that he had picked up—would follow him at their leisure. There was no danger; "he" never fired at that hour.

What day in the week was it? No matter. Not a good day, in any case, for Christoph Kroysing. After a great deal of controversy the French high command had, at the instance of the Foreign Ministry, allowed foreign journalists and neutral correspondents to visit the Verdun front, with much reluctance and for a very short time. At that moment, Axel Krog, a much esteemed and conscientious writer for important Swedish papers, was standing in the battery position opposite, which had never yet fired out of season, and where his visit was received with varying feelings of disgust, sarcasm, and cordiality.

Monsieur Krog, explained the escorting officer from the Press Section of the General Staff, was an old member of the Swedish colony in Paris, and was a fervent admirer of France. "Then he'd better join the Foreign Legion," growled Gunner Lepaille in the purest accent of the Paris *banlieues*. But the French artillery was the best in the world. It had never been so good since Bonaparte, the only gunner among the great commanders. Monsieur Krog must be given an opportunity to publish a telling article in Sweden, where German propaganda was so shameless and persistent. Monsieur Krog had better place himself in charge of the observation officer and by the aid of a field glass watch the slim shells leap from their bronze tubes and pick off a few Germans. There was that light railway over yonder, units on the Poivres ridge were being relieved, and the Boche was using the ravine to move troops back from the line. The gunners despised what they read in the papers; they cursed with equal venom those who prolonged the war and those who shirked it; added to which the gun would have to be cleaned all over again; still, it was an honour to demonstrate how well the Thirty-Third Brigade could shoot. Guns One and Two were ready and awaited their target; the game that would so soon be put up two and a half kilometres away within the circle of vision of the field glass.

Christoph Kroysing leapt like a boy over the shell-holes, and trotted cheerfully downhill beside the rails. When things took a turn for the better, they never do so by halves. He could now choose whether he should hand his letter to this genial lieutenant, or to friend Bertin next morning. Thus had the law of alternatives so marvellously proved its truth. With this in his mind he had reached the level bottom of the ravine and the tawny, desolate expanse stretched out before him. Another seventy or eighty yards before there was any cover.

What was that? Kroysing swung round; but even as he looked about him, the bursting explosive, the hot steel



of the splintering missile, crashed into the ground behind him. Pale and shaken, but by a miracle unhurt, he dashed at the nearest shell-hole. But then Gun Two spoke its word, a burst of black and yellow and a roar at Kroysing's feet, whirled him round and flung him to the earth. "God, God, God," he thought, as his consciousness faded, and the point of his chin struck the iron rail. "Mother, Mother, Mother. . . ."

The Swedish journalist beside the French observation officer paled and said: "Thank you very much." It was indeed admirable shooting, but he thought he had seen enough. The Hessians were running down the track with the lieutenant at their head. They had noticed at once that the young Bavarian was not really up to the game, or he would have flung himself down behind the rails at the very first explosion; crumps were not to be taken as a joke. They crouched round the prostrate figure, from which a pool of blood had begun to ooze. Dr. Tichauer bent cautiously over him. Nothing could be done. A morphia syringe was the only thing that could help him now. A great shell-splinter had hacked off shoulder-blade and arm joint, as cleanly as a butcher's cleaver, cutting through the great veins and probably the lobe of the lung as well. Why bring him back to consciousness? And while the astonished A.S.C. men and sappers darted out from the wood up above, wondering why on earth Franz had begun to shoot at so unwonted an hour, and the little group below signalled frantically to them to come down, Lieutenant Mahnitz, with sickness at his heart, looked at the outstretched form, with which he had talked so pleasantly five minutes before, and which now began to moan like a suffocating animal; and half lying on the ground, propped upon his elbows, he said, apparently to himself, but loud enough for all his little silent war-worn troop to hear: "God! When is this bloody business going to end!"

## CHAPTER VI: TO BILLY

NEXT day, as the A.S.C. men made their way up to the front line, taking the route round the heights of the Meuse on this occasion, someone said: "Lucky we stopped at home yesterday, there was some shooting round here, and a couple of badly wounded men were sent through to Billy." Bertin listened sceptically to the excited talk, and looked round eagerly for Kroysing. Would he come along later? Or was he already in the gun position? The allotment of work had been changed and had brought him and his spade into the company of two Bavarians who were hacking away the clay beside the new lines, so as to make it easier to haul the trucks. "What has become of your Sergeant Kroysing?" he asked the nearest, a freckled man with reddish hair and a prominent Adam's apple. Without raising his head, the other inquired what he wanted of him. "Oh, nothing," said Bertin. "It was only that I rather liked him." "My dear chap," replied the Bavarian, "no one will ever like our Sergeant Kroysing any more," and he hacked savagely at a great clod of clay. At first Bertin did not understand—for so long indeed that the other said furiously: "Have you gone deaf? Kroysing stopped one yesterday and he's gone west; bled like a stuck pig, he did, in the lorry that took him along to the hospital at Billy." Bertin said nothing; he stood, clutching his spade as the colour faded from his face; he coughed once or twice. Strange—strange. And yet—one just stood and said nothing, one did not scream or fall into a frenzy. . . . "It's just the war, you can't do anything, old chap." Was the Bavarian saying that? He was, and he spat to clear

his throat. It had happened yesterday morning, his left shoulder had been smashed to bits. "Well, it's you today and me tomorrow—we'll never see him again." They went on working. "Had you met Sergeant Kroysing before?" asked the Bavarian after a silence, looking up, the sweat pouring from his face. Bertin said: "Yes, he was rather a friend of mine, and if there were more of his sort, the army would be a better place." "Yes," replied the Bavarian, his solemn blue eyes set in a broad, rustic face. "It certainly would, old chap. You wouldn't find another sergeant like him if you looked around for three days. Though there's one or two that aren't sorry he went west, yesterday afternoon." Then he drew back his head into the open collar of his tunic, as though he had said too much. "You can speak freely to me," said Bertin in an undertone; "I know all about it." "Oh, do you?" snapped the Bavarian, and turned away.

However, at the midday interval, he turned up again, in the company of another shorter and younger companion with drawn face and dark, stricken eyes. Both wore their caps cocked over one ear, and their tunics unbuttoned, and in an innocent, casual sort of fashion they strolled off with Bertin between them. Three men of the labour battalion made their way into the shade, and sat as though to take a little nap. Among the bristly, decapitated stumps a fragment of a heavy shell or mine, embedded in the earth and looking like a little table, lay poised on a steel leg as broad as a hand and as thick as a finger, its round, plate-like surface upturned to the sky. Such was the aspect of the world in which men like Kroysing went down.

"This," said the Bavarian, "was Sergeant Kroysing's batman; he helped to cut the tunic off him and bandage him when he was hit. Something dropped out of the blood-stained rags that none of our lot particularly wants to keep; if you like to have it, old chap, here it is. It looks as if it had been a letter." Bertin said he would be



glad to have it, feeling strangely moved at the persistence with which the will of a man dead, or almost dead, prevailed. And the Bavarian A.S.C. man handed him a square, sodden, brownish-red, still slightly sticky object, looking like a thin cake of chocolate, on which lines of purplish writing were faintly discernible. Bertin grew pale, but he accepted this ultimate salutation and the charge that went with it and put it in the side pocket of his haversack. As he let the loaded sack slip back on to his hip again, it seemed to have grown heavier; and a strange chill, a faint shudder, seemed to course through the body of the man who had thought to find a friend, but had now been entrusted with a mission that would be full of doubt and difficulty. Poor young Kroysing! When the grey cat suddenly darted out before Bertin, like a root come to life, and glared at him impudently with its bottle-green eyes, a savage fury came upon him; with a curse he flung the nearest shell-splinter at her, missing her, of course, and noticed the Bavarian's wondering eyes upon him. It was still alive. That sort of thing always kept alive.

In the early afternoon a soldier was standing doubtfully outside the door of the company orderly room. Anyone who was not ordered to present himself there was glad to keep away, for such interviews were not apt to be very agreeable except for the favourites of Glinsky, ex-insurance agent; decent people preferred to give the place a wide berth. But Bertin of the A.S.C. stepped up to the felt-covered door, crooked his finger, knocked, entered, and assumed the prescribed attitude. The set expression of his face, the tiny wrinkle above the bridge of his spectacles, showed that there was something on the man's mind. But Glinsky, with his stripes on his litevka, his cigar between his thick lips, and the opaque expression in his bulging eyes, had long since ceased to trouble himself about such matters. All too long in civil life had he had

to lend an ear to the emotions of those whom he hoped to persuade to insure their lives, so that their contributions might provide him with his livelihood. Now there was a war on, and the state was looking after him; he could get his own back, and he did so. He himself had never known (though Frau Glinsky had) how deeply he had suffered under the obsequious demeanour he had had to assume in the daytime; life was all the sweeter to him now. . . .

Bertin—that was the water-tap fellow who had his beard shaved off. At the moment Glinsky preferred the last designation, he would certainly find occasion to use the first in the course of the interview. “Well, you with the shaved-off beard, and what may you want, eh?” he asked in the hot and rather musty atmosphere of the orderly room.

He of the shaved-off beard asked for a warrant to go to Billy and return after lights-out. The connexions were uncertain, so that he would need the evening for the journey back.

The two clerks grinned furtively. After a special fatigue a soldier had of course a claim to such a warrant. He is not a convict and does not carry chains on his ankles. But power is power, and favour is favour, and the chap had better not waste time thinking he was going to get to Billy that evening.

Bertin knew the two clerks. Sperlich, stupid and good-humoured, had had some sort of job in an office; Wuerfurth, with a goatee beard and a pair of high-magnifying spectacles before his squinting eyes, was a technical draughtsman in the Borsig Works at Tegel. Under the previous sergeant they had been quite passable fellows, but baseness is infectious, and they had been corrupted. Bertin felt he had these three people against him; it would be difficult to get that warrant. What did he want in Billy, asked Glinsky with specious affability. Bertin wished to visit a friend who had been seriously wounded



and admitted to hospital the day before. At the recollection of the shock he had suffered, he swallowed two or three times; perhaps, too, there was a faint quiver in his voice.

"Indeed," observed the pompous Glinsky in a casual tone; "a wounded man in hospital; I should have thought a laundress or a tart more in your line."

Bertin heard a few bloated flies buzzing round a fly-paper that hung down from the low ceiling. The company knew he had been married not long before; and this should have provoked a protest, a flash of indignation. But Bertin did not protest. He wanted to see Kroysing, and he meant to get to him, and he was not shaken out of his self-control by a man like Glinsky. So he calmly surveyed his adversary's pallid orderly-room skin and his prying nose, and made no reply, which was the best thing he could have done. Bertin's silence seemed to content Herr Glinsky. He settled himself comfortably in the chair. Who was to have the honour of a visit from the distinguished author? It must be a French prisoner at the least. Bertin smiled involuntarily; the hit was not unexpected. No, he replied, it was a volunteer, in command of the support troops at Chambrettes farm, Sergeant Kroysing, severely wounded the day before.

Grey-haired Herr Glinsky's eyes and mouth opened wide with delight. The affair of the court martial had been much talked about, and naturally a man like Glinsky sympathized with all those among his Bavarian comrades whom it was likely to get into trouble. But he mastered himself in a flash. "You can spare yourself the journey. The man's dead long ago, he was buried this afternoon." Bertin realized that this was a lie. The orderly room of 1/X/20 was not commonly in touch with the Bavarian labour battalion; the N.C.O.s of the two units merely exchanged news and gossip when they happened to meet at the large ordnance stores at Mangiennes or Damvillers. But the lie was one that it was hard to counter; he could not very well say that, in that case,

he wanted to visit the dead man's grave. "Indeed," he answered slowly, "dead and buried?"

"Yes," snapped Glinsky, "and now get back to your work; let me have a sight of your rear side, and mind you don't turn on any more water-taps. Dismiss!" Bertin swung round and departed. But Herr Glinsky made haste to ring up Sergeant-Major Feicht of the Bavarians, and wish him luck on being rid of what was hanging over his head.

Bertin, now outside in the sunshine, meditatively placed one foot before the other. If he could not get a warrant to go to Billy, he would go without one. But he must take the advice of an expert before proceeding further. At that very instant he caught sight of Sergeant Böhne walking along and rubbing his hands. Behind him Lebede, the ex-innkeeper who belonged to Böhne's squad, was carrying an extra strong brew of coffee, which he intended to drink with Böhne and a couple of others over a solemn game of skat. For the park had issued orders that all front-line working parties should go off duty when they got back, a fiat which the company had no power to alter. Böhne's bright elephant eyes grew grave as Bertin in an undertone explained his quandary. The fate of the young Bavarian had quite upset Böhne, who had two children at home; Karl Lebede merely shrugged his shoulders over the vagaries of the orderly room. There were more ways than one to Billy, he observed.

In the meantime the door of the hut had closed behind them, and only a few men were strolling about in the silent, long room. At the table in the right-hand corner Corporals Näglein and Althans were waiting for their coffee and their game of skat. It was about time something was done, said Althans, if Prussian *esprit de corps* had come unstuck. *Esprit de corps*, as they all knew, was one of Grassnick's favourite phrases. Corporal Näglein was a timid man, a small farmer from the Altmark, beside whom Corporal Althans seemed a very bold fellow.

Althans was a gaunt reservist, not long away from his infantry regiment, who in the February attack in this sector had been hit in the ribs by a heavy shell-splinter and had lain for months in bandages. He kept up a sort of courier service between the battalion in Damvillers and the company, without actually doing duty as an orderly. He was consequently in possession of a permanent pass, allowing him to move about the roads at any time, a document that was not made out in any name, but merely to the bearer. He carried it in the cuff of his tunic, which was then hanging behind him on a nail.

And so, a few minutes later, Bertin of the A.S.C. was trotting down the planked paths and short cuts to the park, past columns of fatigue parties unloading and hauling ammunition. He had a pot of good coffee inside him, and something else in the cuff of his tunic.

Schulz, the laboratory sergeant in the field-gun park, and his two assistants always knew of ways and means to get to Romagne, Mangiennes, and Billy.



## CHAPTER VII: THE ELDER BROTHER

“SERGEANT KROYSING—yes. To be buried at half-past five.”

Bertin was shown a stairway leading underground. In a whitewashed cellar three coffins were waiting, one of them still open. In it lay what was still visible of Christoph Kroysing—his placid face. Damped linen towels hanging from the walls and a whirling ventilator cooled the room, in which it was none the less an effort to breathe. But this made little impression on Bertin. There he stood, beside the coffin of his last and most unlucky friend. “A youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance,” he thought, in the language of the Bible; and then, in a shock of awed emotion: “O Lord . . . what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? . . . His days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.” The long lashes in the sallow face and the line of the eyebrows, curved like musical notations, stood out from the deathly oval of the cheeks. The set lips were bitterly down-drawn, but the forehead curving up from the temples under the soft hair was broad and finely arched. “Oh, Kroysing,” thought Bertin, as he looked down at the handsome face, “why did you do just what they wanted and get caught?” And he thought of all the mothers hoping that their prayers might avail, and the hopes of the fathers, and the tasks of the future. In one corner there were some other benches ready for still more coffins. He dragged out one of them, sat down, and fell to meditation beneath the whirr of the ventilator. Once more the beech foliage was about him, green and shimmering, the gashed trunks looking

like weathered copper; they sat once more at the edge of a shell-hole, a pair of field boots beside a pair of puttees, among rusting shell-splinters half buried in the earth, while the grey cat with the bottle-green eyes glared defiantly at Kroysing's hand. All that was past, as irrevocably past as the tone of the voice which he could hear in that moment: "You are the first man I've met for two months to whom I could talk about such things, and if you like, you could really help me." Help? Why, of course he would. And whither did human help bring a man? To a place like this. . . .

He sat huddled on his bench, shaking his cropped head, his small eyes clouded by his meditations on the strange construction of the world.

The door opened gently; another soldier came into the cellar. A gaunt figure, and so tall that he almost had to stoop. Fair hair, parted on the left; and no nails on the soles of his boots. The uniform was so shabby, and the shoulder-straps had faded to so dirty a grey, that Bertin did not at first realize that this was an officer. He jumped up and stood to attention, with his hands to the seams of his trousers. "For God's sake," said the other in a deep voice, "don't stand on your hind legs beside a coffin. Did you belong to his unit?" And walking to the foot of the coffin, he said: "So this is the end of you, Christel. You always were a good-looking lad," he went on reflectively. "Well, don't worry, sooner or later we shall all lie there like you, except that we shan't be so comfortable."

Seldom had Bertin seen brothers less like each other. Eberhard Kroysing, lieutenant of sappers, his bony hands folded over the peak of his cap, did not conceal the two tears that were trickling down his cheeks. Bertin moved softly backwards, with one more yearning look at the dead boy's face, gulping down an emotion that he would not let himself express. "Don't go," growled Lieutenant Kroysing in his deep voice. "We don't need

to drive each other away; he'll be screwed down soon enough anyhow. Just see if the bearers are coming." Bertin understood and turned away. The lieutenant kissed his little brother on the forehead. "I've got a great deal to be sorry for, old chap," he thought; "it was a tough job for you to grow up with me around all the time. But why were you so like Mother, you young ruffian, and I only like Father?"

Boots were indeed approaching outside. Carelessly and callous at first, but moving more circumspectly when they noticed the lieutenant's presence, the bearers began by carrying the two other coffins away, pinewood boxes roughly nailed together. Bertin helped them up the steps and out of the door so as to leave the two brothers alone.

When the strangers were outside, Eberhard Kroysing took his little cigar-cutter out of his pocket and clipped a lock of hair from his brother's forehead, for their mother. He put it carefully away in his letter-case, and the silent dialogue with his young brother went on: "Why did you envy me my stamp collection, Christel? Why did we always quarrel? We might have become quite good friends as men. It is a fine and lovely thing when brothers live together in harmony, says Doctor Luther: a pious aspiration. Our family has no luck. The handsome mausoleum in the Protestant cemetery at Nürnberg will be visited no more. You will lie here in Catholic earth, and the rats will certainly eat me up when the last shell has burst. . . . *Allons*, time to shut up shop, let me do the last thing I shall ever do for you, my lad," and choking down the dry sobs in his throat, he kissed his brother once again on the cold mouth and the dark down round his lips, carefully fitted the lid on the long box, and screwed the corners down with practised hands. When Bertin returned with the stretcher-bearers, an officer, cap on head, strode smartly past them into the slanting sunshine of the upper world.



The funeral was a commonplace affair, ill disguised by a certain solemnity. The three fallen heroes were blessed by an army chaplain, whose surplice barely covered the uniform which was his usual wear. Sections of the units concerned had been detailed to attend, under the command of N.C.O.s; the Bavarian A.S.C. men had brought with them a wreath of beech leaves as a last tribute from the reserve troops at Chambrettes farm, none of whom had been given leave for the funeral. The three coffins were laid one above another in the narrow grave, and Bertin caught himself heaving a sigh of relief; little Kroysing, last to be lowered, would not need to bear in death the burden of his fellow-men. The other two men had been artillery drivers, killed on their way to the ammunition dumps, and their comrades' carbines fired the last salvo over all three. Then the funeral cortège hastily scattered into the canteens of Billy, to seize the opportunity of buying chocolate, jam, and various alcoholic drinks.

A hospital orderly came up to Lieutenant Kroysing; the unit had applied for his brother's effects and had already sent for them; and he handed Kroysing a list that the latter eyed abstractedly and put into his pocket. Meanwhile, Bertin, after a sharp inner conflict, came to a decision. He walked stiffly up to his friend's brother and asked to speak to him. Eberhard Kroysing eyed him with a faintly quizzical air. The unlucky men of the labour battalions used every encounter with an officer to ask advice about their petty troubles, or air a grievance on the quiet. This fellow, plainly a university man and a Jew, no doubt wanted to pester him about leave or something of the kind. "Fire away, my man," said he; "but be quick, or you'll get left behind."

"I don't belong to this unit," said Bertin in a deliberate tone; "and I wanted to have a few minutes' conversation with the Herr Lieutenant. It's about your brother," he added, marking the other's expression of refusal.

Billy had been badly wrecked by shellfire, and the damage was only patched up here and there where most acutely needed. As they walked through the streets, both were silent, both brooding on a freshly upturned grave. "It was kind of you to send that wreath," said the lieutenant suddenly.

"It was sent by the men at Chambrettes farm near where he was killed. I met him there for the first time—the day before yesterday."

"You came to my brother's funeral after only knowing him for so short a time as that? I must remember to thank your sergeant." Bertin smiled faintly. "My orderly room refused me leave to come, so I came on my own." "That's odd," observed Eberhard Kroysing, as they went into the Officers' Club, a sort of restaurant for officers with soldier-waiters.

A few gentlemen in polished shoulder-straps lifted their eyebrows at the sapper lieutenant and the A.S.C. private who sat down face to face at the little table in the window. Such association between officers and men was disapproved; indeed, it was forbidden. But the deplorable customs of the trenches did not always square with the orders issued by the administration in the rear. And the tall sapper with the Iron Cross, First Class, did not look as though he would welcome advice.

He looked, indeed, remarkably forbidding after the first few words uttered by Bertin. Had he known that his brother had had differences with the other N.C.O.s? Certainly, but when a man is stuck in the sapper depot at Douaumont, and under French artillery fire day in day out, it is difficult to take much interest in the petty squabbles of the N.C.O.s on another unit. The wine was excellent, as Bertin did not fail to recognize; he emptied his glass and asked whether it had not occurred to the Herr Lieutenant that there might be some connexion between these same squabbles and the death of Christoph Kroysing.



At this the lieutenant's eyes opened very wide indeed. "Look here," he said in a suppressed tone; "in this place men fall like chestnuts from a tree every day of the week. If people tried to discover a connexion every time a man was killed . . . !"

"Well, will you let me tell you how I came across your brother, and what he told me between ourselves?"

Eberhard Kroysing looked into his wineglass, twisting it slowly between his fingers, while Bertin, with his eyes fixed on the other's face, told his story in measured sentences. He sat with his chest pressing against the edge of the little marble table, which was rather too high for the chairs, and he sensed the antagonism of the young man opposite him; but he felt he had to speak. From the broad end of the room came the raucous laughter of men cheered by wine.

"Flatly," said Eberhard Kroysing at last, "I don't believe a word, sir, of what you have just been telling me. Not that I suspect you of trying to take me in. But Christoph was a bad witness. He was too imaginative. The artistic temperament, you know—he was a poet. . . ."

"A poet?" repeated Bertin, rather taken by surprise.

"I think he may be called so," observed the other. "He wrote verse, very pleasant verse, and he was composing a play, a drama, he called it, a tragedy or something of the sort. Such men are apt to get their fancies too firmly fixed in their heads. They're a prey to prejudice and suspicion. Now I, my dear sir, am a man of fact; I'm a civil engineer, a profession that leaves no room for fantasies."

Bertin eyed his companion for a moment. He was perplexed that anyone could remain so sceptical after showing himself so responsive at the outset to Bertin's tone and personality.

"I would not assert," pursued Eberhard Kroysing, "that my brother was a fool and a babbler, but you people are too prone to persecution mania; you see

yourselves surrounded by villains trying to do you down. Proofs—that's what you must produce, young man."

Bertin reflected. "Would a letter from your brother be a proof, Herr Lieutenant? A letter that my wife was to send on to your mother? A letter in which the whole affair was described, so that your uncle at Metz should be in a position to intervene?"

Eberhard Kroysing looked up and fixed his hard eyes on the other's face. "And what has my uncle Franz got to do with this business which you seem to know so much about?"

"He was to have hurried on the court martial, so that Christoph could have made a statement."

"And how long was the boy in that cellar at Chambrettes farm?"

"More than two months without a single day's relief."

Eberhard Kroysing drummed his fingers on the table. "Give me that letter," said he.

"It's in my haversack," replied Bertin. "I couldn't of course know that I should meet the Herr Lieutenant here."

Eberhard Kroysing smiled grimly. "Good for you. I got the news indirectly through the battalion staff, and if Franz hadn't been uncommonly forbearing, I should never never have got here in time. Well, I must have that letter."

Bertin hesitated. "There is just one thing I must add. He had the letter in his pocket when he was hit. It's absolutely soaked with blood and quite illegible."

"His blood," said Eberhard Kroysing. "So there's something of him left upon this earth. But that doesn't matter; there are chemical dodges that will put that right. My N.C.O. Süssmann will fix it for me easily. I admit," he said, and his brow darkened, "that it looks as if I hadn't cared much about the lad. Damn it," he burst out, "I had other things in my head. I thought

the court martial had reported long ago, and put everything in order. It's a myth that brothers are always devoted. As often as not they're bitter enemies. Or is it different in your part of the world?"

Bertin reflected and agreed that was not different. He heard of his brother Fritz mostly through his parents. He, by the way, had been all the time on service with the Fifty-Seventh, in Flanders and at Lens, in the Carpathians and on the Hartmannsweilerkopf, and now, God help him, in the worst corner of the Somme battle, and who knew whether he was still alive? It was just a hidebound habit of speech, this talk of brotherly love. Brothers always contended for favour and predominance, and Cain and Abel, just like Romulus and Remus, were typical brothers, not to mention the example of the German princely houses in which the weaker brethren were usually blinded, consigned to monasteries or murdered.

"We must push off now," said Kroysing to Bertin. "I'll pick up a lorry that will get me to my devil's cellar tonight. We shall drive through your park. And if I'm convinced of the facts I'll put them up to the appropriate court martial and make a case of it. I'm not vindictive. But if these gentlemen have deliberately robbed a mother of her son, to await the resurrection on the third story of that honoured grave, they shall make my acquaintance."

They waited for the lorry outside the club. The sky above the heights towards Romagne, called the heights of Morimont, was transparently green. Bertin was hungry. He counted on someone in his platoon having kept back a bit for his supper. But if not, a man who had done his dead friend's behest might well content himself with ration bread. No one was better qualified than Lieutenant Eberhard Kroysing to bring his brother's murderers to account.

The leather-jacketed driver drove his lorry at crazy speed along the white roads, as he wanted to reach the firing-zone, where he would have to drive without lights,



before darkness fell. It was a bare half-hour before they stopped by the water troughs near the Steinbergquell hutments. Bertin ran up the slope, reappeared in a few moments, and handed the lieutenant something that looked like a slab of stiff cardboard wrapped in white paper.

A few nights later, Bertin of the A.S.C. had a remarkable experience which only the evidence of his own eyes next day could induce him to believe.

He was, like many short-sighted people, a man of his ears, for whom the mysterious and menacing world about him, through which he gropes his way, is embodied as a sound. And as man hears likewise in his sleep, because since the days of glaciers and forest swamps danger approaches in the darkness, Bertin had found it very hard to accustom himself to sleeping in a dormitory. The sultry July night brooded over the valley that dips between Moirey and Chaumont like a butcher's trough, always brimming with swamp mists from the Theinte. The milky radiance of the moon, now almost at the full, made them treacherously transparent; good weather for airmen; that night the watchers of the sky would not watch in vain.

Shortly afterwards the machine-guns of the advance post a few kilometres beyond Thil wood started a furious fusillade; the anti-aircraft guns burst into their characteristic roar; and red puffs of shrapnel smoke shot up into the sky. They were coming! And not before they were expected; indeed, some of the more timorous in that company, a few gunners and a few men of the labour battalion, had been sleeping for the past week in the old dugouts on the slope of the road. The telephone from the advance post by Moirey camp buzzed insistently. Franz had not come over at one in the morning to drop gingerbread. The telephonists at Steinbergquell bundled one of their number out to go and warn the N.C.O.

on duty. A bomb attack on an ammunition park in which there were some thirty thousand shells, including five thousand gas shells, and the men asleep in huts, was no light matter. The sentries dashed about, while the faint midge-like humming of the French motors drew nearer from the south—the ammunition park lay to the north of the camp—and rushed into the dormitories shouting: “Air attack. All outside with gas-masks. Lights out. Fall in behind the kitchen hut.” Behind the kitchen hut the land sloped gradually in such a way as to interpose a smooth patch of rising ground between it and the perilous ammunition.

Many of the labour battalion slept in their boots; none needed more than a couple of seconds in which to wake up, slip on their boots, and in their overcoats or tunics, pants or trousers, leap with a crash on to the planked floor. The huts were left open and empty in the pallid grey night. The clatter of nailed boots was drowned by the defensive fire of the machine-guns and the guns. Searchlights swept their white antennæ across the sky to help bring down the midges up above; three of them—or were there five? How high they were flying! Breathless, scattered over the southern slope, the defenceless A.S.C. men peered upwards from the wet grass or the hard clayey earth at the sky from which the thunder was so soon to fall. A high-pitched whistle detached itself from the zenith, two-voiced, many-voiced, growing louder; a flash and a roar in the valley below, and a dull boom of thunder rumbling across to the waiting throng. But for that one second, at the point of contact, the fiery chambers of the earth seemed to have burst open. Nine times the stricken valley roared; then the smoke-screen, by which they had evaded the defensive fire, dispersed; the machines moved away towards the west, possibly to make another attack beyond the Meuse.

“Well,” said Halezinsky of the A.S.C. in his mincing voice to his friend and neighbour Karl Lebede: “They’ve

got away with it again." "Think so?" said Lebede doubtfully, as he lit a nocturnal cigarette with notable self-command. "I rather fancy they're after the railway station, August, and they dropped one egg on it all right. They'll pay us a visit next time."

It was a sore temptation to run into the valley; there would still be red-hot splinters and fuses in the bomb-holes, which they could sell at a good price. By morning the railwaymen would have of course cleared up the mess. But the N.C.O.'s bundled their men back into bed.

In the meantime the huts had been aired and cooled; it was half-past one, there was still time for a good four hours' sleep; Halezinsky went to his mattress and flashed a torch on to it to scare away any possible rats, and lit up the next bed as he did so. On it lay a man asleep. "Karl," he called softly, in a voice that shook with amazement, "come and look; here's a sound sleeper, I don't think." With something like respect the two men surveyed Bertin. He had been deaf to the alarm, the attack, the explosions of the bombs which had wrecked the railway and ravaged the fields seventy or eighty yards beyond the road. Next morning he would be the only one to doubt the incidents of that night; he would think they were trying to fool him and would sacrifice part of his midday rest to inspect the bomb-holes which had emerged in the night among the green herbage, each one big enough to hold a telephone booth; he would bend down and touch the shattered rails, and notice the recently filled shell-holes inside the track. So utterly had his slumbering ego turned away from the world of war, in which a man like young Kroysing could come to such an end. A few kilometres ahead, at that very moment machine-guns were sweeping the ravaged earth beneath the limelight of the flares; thousands of men were crouching in potholes or behind breastworks, trying to withstand the merciless hurricane of fire, smothered in earth, gashed



or riddled with shell-splinters, mangled by direct hits, poisoned or choked by gas. But here, a mile and a half away, a man of about thirty slept right through a bomb attack, withdrawn into the securest and profoundest refuge allotted to mankind, akin to that of unconsciousness and the grave.

**BOOK TWO**  
**RESISTANCE**





## CHAPTER I: A TURNING-POINT

ALL the towns and villages, large and small, in the Meuse area served the Germans as *points d'appui*, and there they took up their abode. There was, of course, much admiration for the heroes of the front line, their privations, and their steadfastness in squalor and in peril; but those behind the lines did not allow these feelings to affect their own self-esteem. As the distance from the front increased, the more clearly did the war take on the semblance of a system of administration and organization. A horde of officials in military array here exercised unfettered dominion; and they frowned on any suggestion of the ultimate return of conquered territory. What they needed they impounded, and paid for it in stamped paper which the French would have to redeem in due course. Smartness, alertness, promptness, all the soldierly qualities for their own sakes—these in their eyes were the highest values. The fact that they lived in bare stone houses, primitive and rustic, without the amenities of running hot water, tiled bathrooms, and upholstered furniture, they regarded as a hardship for which the nation and the Fatherland owed them an indemnity; this was their war.

The villages of Damvillers was modestly situated on its small provincial railway called Le Meusien, one among hundreds like it, without influence on the destinies of the surrounding countryside. It was quite unaltered, except that in place of French peasants in blue blouses and sabots the hobnails of the German soldiers and their officer's polished boots rasped or creaked on the pavements and the deal floors. Some had permanent billets in Damvillers, some were passing through; others looked in from time to

time, to relieve the boredom of existence, and provide for the needs of their units; among the former being Major Jansch, and among the latter, Captain Niggl.

The boredom of existence . . . Officers were the pillars of the German state; officers of the fighting-line, of the Landwehr, and behind the lines chiefly of the Reserve and the Landsturm; and very imposing gentlemen they were, with dirks at their belts and helmets on their heads. The polished helmet-spike might be conceived as embodying the peak of their life upon this earth; neither Niggl, tax-collector, nor Psalter, headmaster from Neuruppen, nor Jansch, editor, from Berlin-Steglitz, could ever have been more filled with self-importance, though the latter, as editor of *The Fleet and Army Weekly*, was privileged to possess some military standing in civil life. Their income in peacetime amounted to about three hundred marks a month. But now, as long as the war lasted, on the first of every month the field cashier handed them thrice that amount; moreover, their food and drink and tobacco cost them very little, and their lodging nothing at all. Such was the lot of hundreds of gentlemen in Crèpion, Vavrille, Romagne, Chaumont, in Jamez and Vitarville, and indeed everywhere an army sat down and occupied the land. As far as they were concerned, the war might go on for ever, in spite of frequent boredom and the tedium of petty detail. Where the lines of communication began, at the patrols of field police on the crossroads, men laboured under the weariness of a daily task devoid of any intellectual life, without women or children, amid a struggle for existence without the relief of science or art, cinemas, gramophones, or wireless, and almost without politics. The lines of communication were just as indispensable to the front as is the circulation of the mother's blood to her unborn child; thus it lives and feeds and expands, and draws all the material it needs. "Supplies": that was the magic word of the rear administration, and everything depended on its absolute reliability; from compressed



hay for the horses, to shells, leave-trains, and ration bread; without it the front lines could not stand for a week. So they sunned themselves in the glory of their self-importance. It radiated from every orderly and staff-sergeant, but most of all from the officers. They did their duty, enjoyed their dinners, drank the good wine of the country, intrigued against each other, and exchanged small services for a consideration. Thus it came about that Herr Major Jansch of the A.S.C. Battalion X/20 marched with jingling spurs up the steps to Lieutenant Psalter's billet. A major calling on a lieutenant, and the major no less a personage than Jansch—and the lieutenant no more of a personage than little snub-nosed Lieutenant Psalter of the lorry park, with black cropped hair, pock-marked and short-sighted—could the world be coming to an end? Far from it. A lieutenant in the motor transport has lorries at his disposal. An A.S.C. major has normally no dealings with him except in the way of duty; but if he wants a favour out of him, he must ask for it in friendly fashion. The railway transport officer at Damvillers belonged to the dining-club of the Moirey artillery-park officers, which was at odds with Major Jansch. This transport officer would be likely to inquire rather closely into every case of wine that Major Jansch wanted to send home—if indeed it really was wine. All this might be used to dig a grave for the major into which he might quietly disappear. (It was to hit him all the harder when the time came, that they had agreed with Herr Grassnick to suppress the unpleasant water-tap affair for the moment.) For these reasons Major Jansch's goods had to be dispatched from other railway stations. And now a new-born babe may surely understand how it came about that Major Jansch sat affably down at friend Psalter's writing-table, to have a little chat with him, which was the phrase the major used to describe such interviews.

Herr Jansch was a spare man of about fifty, with a predatory profile and a straggly moustache. On the other

chair in the little cottage room sat a large-faced man with a small pointed beard that gave him a genial air, and cunning, watery eyes: Captain Niggel of the Bavarian A.S.C., from their permanent depot on the farther side of the Romagne ridge, and he too was visiting Lieutenant Psalter on a similar little bit of business. He was only passing through Damvillers; he had to make the most of his time; and he begged that his case might be treated as urgent. His business was one of the deepest concern to every soldier; it related to beer, four casks of genuine Munich Hornschuh-Bräu, which Captain Niggel, with the aid of his brother-in-law, had impounded for the benefit of his own four companies, though it had been consigned to the infantry regiments of the two Bavarian divisions in the line. But higher powers had decided that the A.S.C. must have their turn, and the four casks had been lying since the previous day at Dun railway station. But if the infantry got wind of them—then farewell to the good brown barley juice. A cask of beer was worth a spot of burglary. But if Herr Psalter's lorries could get the stuff up to the battalion staff, there would be a little celebration and all friends from Damvillers would be very welcome. The beer could be watered down a bit for the men next day; they would not notice.

Major Jansch listened to all this with disgust. He did not like beer—nasty, bitter stuff, he thought it—nor indeed did he care for the sour red wine which the French inhabitants planted on the unwary under the designation of bordeaux or burgundy. He liked sweeter liquors, a glass of port wine or vermouth, and not much of that, as his tastes lay in other directions. But he concealed his aversion, and he even invited the Bavarian to join him over a morning glass, if he had finished his business at Damvillers by eleven. Herr Niggel had one small matter to arrange with the brigade H.Q. He wanted to get some papers conveyed to Judge-Advocate Mertens at Montmédy, and none of his own men could be spared to take them at the moment.

But orderlies were always going up the line from Damvillers—he would soon find somebody to take them. Meantime Lieutenant Psalter had been telephoning, and had solved both Niggl's and Jansch's business by a combined arrangement. In the afternoon one of the lorries was bringing a sapper company across the sector to Vilosnes, to strengthen the Meuse bridge at Sivry. The driver could easily pick up the major's cases first, dump them at Dun, and there load up Herr Niggl's casks. And the three parted company in mutual satisfaction.

At a quarter past eleven Major Jansch walked into the club; a few minutes later, Herr Niggl appeared, breathing heavily. The large room was quite empty, as the base authorities and the generals of the Fifth Army were always insistent on the observance of official hours. Moreover, there was a great deal of work to be done, as the Somme battle called daily for more guns and troops and transport; there was an unceasing downpour of requisitions from the Fourth Army then under attack; the Verdun sector had lost its unique importance; the confounded French, far from retiring in favour of the English, were actually making more progress than their allies, and looked extremely like getting into Péronne. For the fantastic game of war was played in the same fashion for strips of territory and casks of beer; and the conflict over Major Jansch's egg-boxes, which he alleged to contain red wine paid for out of his own pocket, was equally a struggle for victory and against defeat.

It was pleasantly quiet and cool in the stone house, of which the first floor was reserved for officers. Major Jansch was promptly served; he was feared, though the men jeered at him among themselves for his meanness. Today the major had a new victim on whom to inflict his views. Port wine was set before them, to which they did full justice, and the Bavarian smoked a large and excellent cigar, called "The Conqueror of Longwy," worth fifty pfennigs and supplied to officers for fourteen.



The two gentlemen in grey *litevkas* soon came to an understanding, allowing for certain reservations on both sides. Herr Jansch was anxious to get at his companion's political views. The war had just celebrated its second birthday, but it must not end until Germany had been victorious on all fronts and could dictate a peace. There were a regrettably large number of people at home who were not sound on this point; they had let themselves be humbugged by that red Indian hypocrite Wilson—Social-Democrats and pacifists, long-haired cranks and nincom-poops of all sorts and varieties.

Major Jansch frowned as he sipped his wine. He would go further. Such people ought to be clapped in jail, the sooner the better. Captain Niggl was disposed to agree; jail was the proper place for them; or they might be drafted into labour battalions; what did the major think of that? And he blinked quizzically at his companion.

Major Jansch's silence rejected this suggestion. Before he retired from the army a good many years before, he had been a very correct Prussian captain; now he was in command of two thousand very decent fellows, with four quite tolerable quartermaster-sergeants as company commanders; he wanted no jailbirds in his unit. Not indeed that their services were ever likely to produce an Iron Cross I for their commander; no, he did not possess that decoration, unfortunately, and as things lay, it did not look as if he would get it. There was too much malice and intrigue about. That was a subject on which every officer could tell a tale—eh?

Niggl assented, with no great conviction. He had had a good day, and he was feeling remarkably pleased with himself; he had cleared up an awkward affair, which might have been unpleasant for all concerned, and to those who knew the facts, Captain Niggl could once more figure as the father of his battalion. There had recently, alas, been a casualty in the third company, a certain sergeant had died a hero's death, and Niggl had informed the relatives

with appropriate expressions of regret. The man, unfortunately, had become involved in some court martial proceedings a couple of months before, and Niggel had been able to get the inquiry postponed until the fellow had in the end been killed. A pure accident, of course. Yes, the battalion was in occupation of rather dangerous advance positions. There was nothing for it but to take a man away from his unit when he was bent on fouling his own nest. Fancy the fellow grudging his comrades their bit of meat and sugar and rum. However, Franz had put him down for good and all.

Major Jansch listened to the genial Bavarian, who was not accustomed to port wine. Discipline must be maintained; the principle of subordination must always be considered first. An N.C.O. who slandered his fellow-N.C.O.s destroyed the morals of his unit. None the less, nothing was so dangerous as the creeping discontent now rife in the army, born of politicians' speeches and their insolent curiosity. These gentry were always carping at the German army; there was always something to be called in question—the commissariat, the leave regulations, or the right of complaint. How was a commanding officer to keep his men in hand when they knew that civilians might demand an account of his acts. Only the Pan-German Union recognized the Reich's debt to the armed forces.

Oh, said Niggel lightly, he had no use for unions and that sort of thing; they only stirred up trouble. The men of the third company were perfectly in hand. The identity of the fallen hero had soon become known. He had, incidentally, been barely two months in the position; no, it had not been possible to relieve him, the regulations could not be strictly adhered to during a battle like that round Verdun, and volunteers were none too common. And as he intended to take a commission, and was going off on a course in the autumn, he had to get used to front-line service, hadn't he? Yes, a brother of his had turned



up, a sapper lieutenant, and asked for his brother's effects. Well, he couldn't have them, they were the property of the man's parents in Nürnberg, and had already been sent home—the third company was a trifle too attentive to duty sometimes. Now the field post handled three million missives daily; some of them took rather a long time to arrive, and some of them miscarried. So the affair had come to quite a peaceful end. Judge-Advocate Mertens could put the papers away.

Major Jansch sat fingering his moustache, eyeing the Bavarian with astonishment. So that was the sort of man he was, little as he looked it. It was quite clear that the claims of the service called in emergency for measures from which an old veteran like himself would naturally have recoiled. It was a lesson to him; he had been accustomed to take too high a line; he must not be too proud to learn, even from a beer-swilling Bavarian. He thanked his guest for his agreeable company as Herr Niggel wiped his narrow lips and got up to go. At a quarter to twelve he had an appointment with the divisional chaplain, Herr Lochner, who had offered him a lift in his car. He could not open his mind to the reverend gentlemen, for the man of this world must not interpret or make use of the ways of God for his own purposes. The pair shook hands and parted; the Bavarian trotted downstairs; the Prussian remained seated for a while, and had four glasses of port wine and a cigar put down to his account—114 pfennigs—with a heavy heart, for he hated to spend money; however, he finally consoled himself with the reflection that what he had learned about Bavarian mentality was worth 114 pfennigs. Still pondering, his hands clasped behind his back, he padded down the stairs and out into the harsh sunlight.

## CHAPTER II: ODERINT DUM METUANT

JUDGE-ADVOCATE Carl Georg Mertens was the son of a famous German jurist, whose *Commentary on Civil Law* was the standard work on the subject and had provided formulæ that were now generally in use. The book was summarily referred to as "Mertens," and the author had been received by the Kaiser on more than one occasion. The son grew up in the shadow of the paternal dignity. He became an eminent legal scholar, and while still comparatively young was appointed Professor of Legal History. His own tastes inclined more to the history of civilization, but it would have been madness to ignore the openings which the name of Mertens would give him in the legal world. At the beginning of the war he had gone enthusiastically to the front as a reserve officer, but the need for court martials, combined with some measure of disillusionment, soon revived his naturally pacific disposition. He was fond of books and he suffered greatly from the deprivation of good music. To get a chance of playing duets, he appointed as his assistant a Jewish lawyer; when he discovered the little museum at Montmédy with its pastels and paintings by the Lorraine painter Bastien-Lepage, he felt indemnified for much. He read a great deal and perfected his French on the novels of Stendhal. The days in Montmédy flowed gently past. Into this life of a peaceful scholar, whose scanty legal duties made no great call on his energy, marched Lieutenant Eberhard Kroysing and turned it upside down.

He appeared one morning in his shabby uniform, wearing his Iron Cross I and his shrapnel helmet, a garb against which a new pair of yellow gloves stood out in

startling contrast. He demanded a personal interview with the judge-advocate. With the somewhat ambiguous attitude of mind adopted by noncombatants towards the fighting men, the clerks rather ruefully admitted that the judge-advocate did not start work until ten o'clock, and that his deputy, Sergeant Porisch, had not returned from interrogating a French prisoner. Kroysing laughed. "You seem to be pretty comfortable here. Mind the Franzmann—the one you haven't caught I mean—doesn't get you in the neck one day." He disguised his anger; a man who wants to get his way in the jungles of the lines of communications must adapt himself to the manners and customs of its denizens. And Eberhard Kroysing meant to get his way. He intended to see his brother's file. At the same time he was filled with deep mistrust of each and every inhabitant of these parts. Crows that only pecked each other's eyes out under compulsion. These legal rascals would naturally be more disposed towards the guilty parties in Christoph's company, the sergeants and the corporals, than to him, Eberhard Kroysing, who had so rudely shattered the peaceful idyll of their lives.

The clerk, Lance-Corporal Sieck, who had got the Iron Cross and a bullet through his chest at the end of August 1914 in the fighting round Longwy, felt sorry for the tall, gaunt officer. He assured him that the judge-advocate would arrive punctually at ten o'clock; in the meantime would the Herr Lieutenant like to look at the museum or the view from the citadel? Kroysing eyed the rather communicative, bespectacled little man with a quizzical stare. "Very well, at ten. Please put a note on the judge-advocate's writing table: 'Lieutenant Kroysing to ask for information.' I hope your files are all in order." Then he saluted and went. It was a long time since he had spent an hour at strolling through the streets of a town; not a sign of damage. A peaceful provincial town, with its little shops and cafés. So the daily life of the worthy burghers and their womenfolk still persisted. Kroysing



went into a shop and bought some handkerchiefs, chocolate, cigarettes, and notepaper. He was served in surly fashion and almost in silence. "Let them hate us, provided they fear us," he said to himself in Latin, as he climbed the ascent to the citadel, to look once more upon an unravaged land, shimmering in the summer sunlight, and with a thrill of admiration at the Latin tongue for expressing in three words what needed nine in German.

Kroysing leaned against the heavy balustrade and surveyed the hedged meadows at his feet, the line of the railway into Luxemburg, the little local line by which he had come up from Azannes early that morning. He was seized by a savage loathing of this false and bloated world of peace. He was not one to grudge others their comforts because he led so very different a life. But when a man reflected that at four that morning he had crawled out of Douaumont over a demented, leprous land, and now stood here admiring the view like any lovesick schoolboy, he felt like pelting it with hand-grenades. Through the small door set in the large portal of the citadel emerged an N.C.O. with a file of papers under his arm, with his cap rather awry on his cropped skull. By the cigar in the corner of his mouth an expert would have recognized Porisch the lawyer, disguised as a soldier and on his way back from interrogating French prisoners. When he caught sight of the officer, he took his cigar out of his mouth, held the papers stiffly to his side, and saluted by a surly lift of the head while his round and bulbous eyes sought those of the lieutenant. Kroysing made a contemptuous acknowledgement—he was within an ace of stopping the man and sending him back.

Meantime Corporal Sieck had taken pity on the front-line man and sent an orderly to the judge-advocate's billet with the note that Kroysing had merely asked should be put on his table. It was often eleven o'clock before Judge-Advocate Mertens entered his unlovely office. There was no telephone from the office to his billet; he did not

wish to be disturbed outside working hours. He had discovered French painting, and by the aid of his musical subordinate, Herr Porisch, and various reproductions and histories of art was feeling his way back from Bastien-Lepage to Corot, and on to Manet and the impressionists. The name of Kroysing on the note told him nothing. "From the front, has very little time" was also written on it. C. G. Mertens was a polite man, who disliked keeping anyone waiting; he hoped Porisch would be able to put him in possession of the facts. During breakfast he seemed to recall that the Kroysing papers concerned an N.C.O. It must be a company commander who wanted a day out in Montmédy. It was often some time before Professor Mertens could concentrate his mind.

One minute past ten Eberhard Kroysing strode up the old-fashioned staircase taking two or three steps at each stride. He had expected a corpulent and easy-going military official; the sensitive bespectacled scholar, with a head that recalled that of the elder Moltke, completely took him aback. Instead of marching into the room and bellowing at the despised base-hound, he felt himself constrained to courtesy. The quiet expression in those blue eyes made it quite clear that no ill-will would ever go forth from that office against his brother or anyone else. Eberhard could be charming when he liked, as a number of young women were only too well aware; and he lightly put forward his request. C. G. Mertens, with his head tilted to one side, listened to the sapper officer's deep voice, which seemed to reverberate in the hollow of his chest.

So it was not a case of a company leader in need of a pretext; this was a brother of Sergeant Kroysing, who had been the subject of certain complaints several months before. Judge-Advocate Mertens knew no more than this; the case had not yet gone beyond the stage of preliminary inquiry. He used the pronounced and sibilant "s" of the Lower Germans, which sounded very old-maidish to Kroysing, who came from Franconia. Mertens went

on: "The matter is at present in charge of my assistant, Herr Porisch, an old pupil of my father, as I subsequently discovered. I mention that fact, Herr Lieutenant, because he wears a sergeant's uniform, and misapprehensions might be awkward." "Damned old fool," thought Eberhard Kroysing; "I don't know who your father was, and I don't care. You attend to your papers." But he actually said: "We have all been something different, sir. I, for instance, was a civil engineer attached to the Technical High School at Charlottenburg. But we've got used to our new skins and do our jobs as well as we can."

Herr Mertens made no reply; he rang the bell and said to the orderly who stood at attention by the door: "Ask Herr Porisch to come and see me for a moment."

"Ah," thought Eberhard Kroysing as, with round eyes in a round face, his left hand still holding a cigar, and his right playing the piano, Herr Porisch entered. "It's a good thing I didn't flatten him out." "We have already met," he said, as they were introduced. "Yes, Fate did drop us a hint," agreed Herr Porisch. "They're hints that are often missed," observed Kroysing. "And now I want a little information about my brother's affair."

Franz Porisch now gave proof of his good memory. The file in the case against Christopher Kroysing, sergeant of reserve, had been referred several months before, at the end of April, to his unit, a Bavarian A.S.C. battalion in the neighbourhood of Mangiennes. But as the examination of those involved and of the accused could not possibly have taken so long, the battalion had been twice asked to return it. The battalion had replied on both occasions that nothing was known as to the whereabouts of the papers; they had been sent on in due course by the third company to Kroysing's replacement unit at Ingolstadt.

"To the replacement unit at Ingolstadt?" repeated Eberhard Kroysing in amazement, sitting stiff and upright, with both hands flat upon his thighs. ("Like a statue of



Rameses," thought Professor Mertens, "with his hooked nose, his thin lips, and eyes that will soon scorch my poor little Porisch." The professor began to feel drawn to his visitor.)

"*Relata refero*," replied Porisch. "I merely repeat what we were told. Ten days or so ago the file, with some additional papers, was officially sent back to us, marked on the cover "Accused killed," with the date and the company's stamp; and soon afterwards the battalion rang up and confirmed the news and asked whether we proposed to put the papers away. We of course said yes; a closed file is the sort of file we like." And then it suddenly occurred to him that here was the brother of the accused, who had been killed, the brother of a dead man. In his consternation he dropped his cigar into the ash tray, and bowed and stammered out: "May I offer my sympathy, my sincerest sympathy."

The judge-advocate got up and stretched out his hand across the writing-table to express his fellow-feelings too.

Eberhard Kroysing looked from one to the other; he longed to bash in both their faces, as he expressed it to himself. These pettifogging fools had been mere accessories to murder. Then he mastered himself, half rose from his chair, touched a soft scholarly hand, and asked, without further remark, if he might see the papers. Sergeant Porisch hurried smartly from the room. And while Mertens looked at him in silence, so as not to disturb his feelings, Kroysing thought, stark with horror: "Christel was not dreaming, and that A.S.C. fellow at the funeral was not lying; they murdered Christel, they got the Franzmann to put him out. Ingolstadt, Sapper Dépôt, city of bridges! And he sat in Chambrettes farm waiting to be relieved, for a chance to put his case. And God forgive me, I let him be eaten up. A dozen blackguards in conspiracy against little Christel."

Then he picked up the thinnest file that had ever reached a court martial: a few sheets, beginning with a report from Field Censor's Office No. 5, and Christel's letter to Uncle

Franz in his brother's familiar neat handwriting, some memoranda from the company exonerating the N.C.O.'s, a statement from the replacement unit in Ingolstadt to the effect that Chr. Kroysing (at present in the field) had last reported there in February and at the beginning of March had been drafted to Niggel's Army Service Corps battalion; then a long interval, and in the middle of July a note from Billy Field Hospital: "Admitted, severely wounded"; and on the next day: "Buried, Billy, Cross No. D3321, with two other non-commissioned officers."

It was very still in the room, the grey bleakness of which was relieved only by a bookcase, an old engraving of Napoleon III, glazed and in a gilt frame, and on the writing-table a photograph of the famous Professor Mertens whom Eberhard Kroysing did not know. From without came the sound of drums and fifes, a company from the Montmédy recruit depot was drilling on the exercise ground. With a throbbing heart Kroysing read his brother's letter, angry and emphatic, full of bitterness against the injustice of the world; he could not sleep for thinking of the way his men were treated. Well, thought Kroysing, he mustn't give way; it was good that these strangers should see how a man could keep himself in hand. He would have been a good company commander, Christel, and a useful citizen later on; and, closing the file, he asked the other two whether there had been nothing in these papers that had struck them.

Mertens turned over the file, then he handed it to Porisch; neither noticed anything unusual. It was often long before a man who was being shifted about at the front could be run to earth. That was why these court martial proceedings were often so delayed. "Quite," said the sapper lieutenant, with a tense expression, and in a tone of rather dangerous courtesy; "and yet you could not see the little catch in it—that my brother was killed at Chambrettes farm, not a mile away from his company, and that his company had kept him there



since the beginning of May, unrelieved until the day on which he was so fortunately killed."

The two lawyers eyed him in astonishment. But then, observed the judge-advocate gently, it was hard to understand why the papers had been sent to Ingolstadt. Porisch's thoughts moved faster. "Time won is a battle won," he said in his deep tones; "always make friends in orderly rooms." Lieutenant Kroysing waved his thin fingers. "Bravo. And then Death came along—as Wilhelm Busch says." Each of the three men knew the neat verses and drawings in which Wilhelm Busch presents the horrors of life with so much placidity and humour.

Judge-Advocate Mertens was at the moment much engaged with the study of the paintings of Corot, whose romantic dawn-lit landscapes greatly appealed to him. But here, in his own domain, and by his aid, something untoward had happened, some irregularity which had resulted, apparently, in a man's death. His pale face flushed; and he asked both men to listen carefully while he went over the case, to see if he had correctly grasped the facts. "If that is so," he concluded in a low tone, "we cannot regard the affair as closed; we must pursue our inquiries."

"I beg pardon," observed Porisch, "if that is so, another and a distinct offence has been committed, and a new file must be opened. We must draw up an indictment for the deliberate murder of Lieutenant Kroysing by—yes, by whom?"

All three were silent. The whole case stood before their minds in its utter impenetrability. Whom could they accuse? Against whom could anything be proved? At what point could the criminal intention be brought to light? The exigencies of the service had demanded that Sergeant Kroysing should stay at Chambrettes farm just as Lieutenant Kroysing had to stay at Douaumont, just as thousands of German soldiers had to stay in the front-line trenches. Men were unceasingly devoured by

the war, each man bound to his place by an order. Who could prove that the order which held young Kroysing fast had been murderous in intent. The third company could indeed be convicted of an error of judgment. But it would no doubt be maintained in reply that an inexperienced clerk had sent the papers in good faith to Ingolstadt, where it was expected that Sergeant Kroysing would shortly turn up with some transport, as he was plainly absent from his unit. So much was clear to all three men after a brief exchange of views. Brahms sonatas were banished from Sergeant Porisch's head; Professor Carl Mertens had quite forgotten the anticipated joys of Corot; an injustice, perhaps a crime, began to take shape before their vision, and held their minds intent. The guilty were well entrenched; they were covered by the exigencies of the service. How could they be got at? But they must be got at, and they would be got at. Lieutenant Kroysing, as he now realized, could count on both these men, and on the legal apparatus at their backs. He suddenly felt very strong.

"Gentlemen," he said gratefully, and there was a gleam of warmth, almost of relief in his eyes, as he looked from the fair-haired civilian to the dark one, "I thank you. We'll rock this child till it falls out of its cradle. What we shall want is a confession, I can see that already. Without a confession by the other side we can't rehabilitate my brother. And that I mean to do. I owe that to my parents and my Uncle Franz, if not to the poor lad, to whom it won't make much odds, though he was pretty sick at having to lie down in his coffin. I've got a last letter from him, which some trifling hindrances have prevented me from reading yet. Perhaps the voice from the grave will name our antagonists. Then I'll see about that confession. How, I don't at the moment know. There is also a witness alive whom my brother asked to help him only the day before his death. Unfortunately I didn't think to ask his name. But that's soon found

out—it seems that my people were working with the A.S.C. men on the railway. We are more or less neighbours—the centre of attraction being Old Man Douaumont, where I hang out.”

Sergeant Porisch looked at him wide-eyed. “Is the Herr Lieutenant stationed at Douaumont?” In his consternation he dropped into strictly service forms of speech. “Is it possible to exist there?” “As you see,” replied Eberhard Kroysing. “Isn’t it under French artillery fire?” “Not all the time,” answered the deep voice. “I suppose the place is full of dead and wounded?” Kroysing laughed. “One soon gets used to that. Nothing has happened to me yet.” “People like us can’t conceive what the place looks like.” “Not very grand from your point of view, but fine from mine. A glorious bit of battered desolation, and old Douaumont in the middle of it, like the shell of a gigantic tortoise. Under it we sit, crawl out of the neck-hole, and play with sand. That’s about what it’s like. However, you imagine it as very much more unpleasant than it really is. It will hold out for a bit, will old Douaumont.” “And bombarded from the air,” said Porisch softly. “Yes,” said Lieutenant Kroysing cheerfully, “and one gets used to that too. But if anything serious happens to me, I’ll appoint a substitute or successor, and send you his name and address. Our affair mustn’t be allowed to suffer. Thank you, gentlemen,” he repeated as he got up. “I’ve now got a little private war to carry alongside the big one. Each of us keeps up his hobbies if he has the time and the service doesn’t suffer. For after all I still owe old Franz a quittance for my brother. One might almost say”—and his long thin lips turned downwards in a mocking curve—“that I’m a few lengths ahead over this business; some little mine-explosions, you know, some gas, a few canister-bombs, and lastly the blockhouses in Herbes wood, which we smoked out with flame-throwers. Our uniform is highly respected over yonder. Until now it



has been an ordinary performance of duty. But now there will be something a bit more personal between him and me." He drew on his left glove, put on his helmet, gave his gaunt hand to the judge-advocate and to the sergeant, drew on his right glove, and said: "Don't be surprised if you don't hear of me for quite a while; but if I don't go west, I'll turn up one of these days," said: "Good morning," and departed.

The two men left behind looked at each other. "That's a fine fellow," said Porisch, expressing both men's impression. "I wouldn't like to be in the shoes of the man who got his young brother killed." Judge Advocate Mertens shook his fine scholarly head. "Alas," he said gloomily, "how men do maltreat each other."

### CHAPTER III: THE EXIGENCIES OF THE SERVICE

LIEUTENANT KROYSING went down the stairs quite otherwise than he had come up them. He no longer ran, he walked, and at every step a plan took shape within his mind. This was a case for strictly official treatment, and he would so proceed. If the exigencies of the service, in the hands of the chieftains of the A.S.C., sufficed to bring down Sergeant Kroysing, in Lieutenant Kroysing's hands they should suffice to extract a confession. These fellows were not men at all; they only looked like men; they were made of hollow tin. Squeeze them a little, and their insides came out, like colour from a tube. There was a placid expression on his face as he closed the brown oak door and almost inaudibly whistled a tune to himself, a mark of the highest good humour.

The lorry with the two leather-clad drivers braked at once when a gaunt officer in steel helmet raised his yellow-gloved hand. The lieutenant was in luck; the lorry belonged to Lieutenant Psalter's park, at Damvillers; it had brought down some goods for urgent dispatch to Germany, and was now returning almost empty. Two men coming off leave, fully loaded, and sitting on their packs, hardly counted. The only difficulty was to provide the Herr Lieutenant with a seat. "If the Herr Lieutenant would sit beside me for two minutes," said the driver, whose speech betrayed that he came from Cologne. "We are picking up some post bags. Then we can offer the Herr Lieutenant an arm-chair."—"Arm-chair is good," said Lieutenant Kroysing with a laugh, as he swung himself up. "So I'm to take the chill off Mother's letters, am I?"

The driver grinned. He was a good fellow, whose home was certainly not Montmédy. When the post bags had been loaded up, Kroysing preferred to stay in front. These lorry-drivers went everywhere, they knew all the roads, all the places of importance, and all the approaches to the firing-line. They were "old hands," as the phrase went, and though reserved with officers, they were very ready with shrewd comments and remarks, and not averse from a joke in the right company, while their eyes never left the blinding white strip of road. Eberhard Kroysing chuckled, rubbed his hands, and sometimes roared with laughter, and he opened his eyes with astonishment and exclaimed: "Already?" when the lorry pulled up at the farm where Captain Lauber had established himself with the sapper staff of the division. "A very pleasant trip, Sergeant. And now life begins to be serious again."

Here Lieutenant Kroysing was known; here he was esteemed as he deserved. The various armies, each a little world with its own speech and its own secrets, lived side by side in the association of war, and when a sapper lieutenant fell in with the infantry he felt like a goat among sheep. But within the organization of his own unit, broadly based upon the front-line companies, and leading through battalion staff, brigade, and division to its culminating point in the sappers' G.O.C. back at Saint-Martin, he was at home and at ease like a beast in its own herd. Kroysing was hungry; he had already accepted a pork sandwich from the lorry-driver, and he was glad when Captain Lauber began by asking him to dinner. He dined with the members of his staff and a few other officers of the neighbourhood; they had established a small mess in an empty building, all officers of the technical services, wireless and anti-aircraft, less than a dozen of them, all keen about their jobs, all highly trained, and with a deep sense of their responsibilities. Captain Lauber, a brown-skinned Würtemberger, the



senior by service, had drawn up certain rules of intercourse. It was forbidden to talk shop at lunch, and politics were forbidden. More than half a bottle of wine was forbidden. Everything else was permitted. Differences of rank were ignored, formalities of address were taken for granted, and acting officers and Jews were included. The sappers, gunners, and all the technical units in the German army suffered from the neglect that was well known to all those familiar with the services. Compared with the cavalry and the infantry they were to a large extent left to look after themselves; neither princes nor noblemen ever served in them; at all manoeuvres they were kept in the background; and the cost of their training and their maintenance was somewhat grudgingly met in times of peace. Not until the first two years of war were over, had the value of the sappers been realized. Who threw bridges across the Meuse under enemy fire? Who cut pathways through the wire entanglements before an attack, armed with nothing but pliers, while the guns lay silent, waiting for their hour? Who drove the saps forward, and dug positions where positions were really beyond all possibility, in swamps or limestone rock? Who wielded the hand-grenades, as large and round as babies' heads? Who was it that produced the accursed gas-containers? Who was it that carried the even more fearsome flame-throwers on their backs, and were burned alive without hope of rescue if a rifle-bullet hit them? Always the sappers. Sapper lieutenants like Kroysing had been through unnumbered attacks and by a miracle of God emerged unwounded. And the telephonists, mending under heavy fire those frail wires without which the army would be helpless, or serving the listening-apparatus in the forward saps, the panting, sweating gunners—all had been the army's step-children until the day before yesterday. Until yesterday, indeed, and in the feudal regiments, where the men are too refined to possess any posteriors, even today.

Lunch passed off very pleasantly. Some went away to sleep, others sat over their coffee. Captain Lauber asked his guest to join him in a game of chess; work did not begin again till half-past two. Eberhard Kroysing played an excellent game of chess, the coffee was good, the cigar was good; he would soon be starting his contest with his unknown antagonists, and there would be plenty of time for him to get back to his molehill before Franz sent over his evening blessing. Life seemed, at that moment, well worth while.

A sultry, clouded August day brooded over the rounded, rolling hills. Captain Lauber and his visitor, their tunics unbuttoned, strolled up and down the long narrow orchard in which the vanished peasants had grown their cider apples, a strip of meadowland dotted with short sturdy trees, now covered with foliage and groaning with green fruit. "They're bearing like that at home in Göppingen in Swabia," observed the captain. "Except that my apples are red, and here they're yellow. That's the only difference. And that's why we're at war."

Eberhard Kroysing was enjoying the company of this intelligent senior officer. The captain was the shorter man, and Kroysing had to reduce his stride to keep in step, but he did so gladly. It was much more comfortable to talk in the open air and under the flickering shadows of the leaves than in the low-ceilinged cottage rooms. "Who would deny it?" he replied. Of course, to make an observation of that sort of a man must be able to put O.C. Sappers after his name. A plain lieutenant would singe his nose if he said such a thing. Still, even a lieutenant can think, and he had learnt to do so, even as a soldier—all the more so as a soldier. "Very few have," growled Captain Lauber. His cropped hair was grey over the temples, and very thin on the crown of his head. Flies made assiduous attacks on this bald patch, and he kept on brushing them away. "What is the position at the front?" said Captain Lauber. "No



nonsense now, tell me straight out, as man to man. That's what I want to know first, before you start in on your own troubles." Eberhard Kroysing shrugged his shoulders. His own troubles? He hadn't any. That was just what he had come for, to say straight out how matters stood. The infantry were getting it in the neck, and that was a fact. All over the valley, mostly overlooked on one flank or the other, in the intervals of frantic fighting they lay huddled in shell-holes or rifle-pits. Thirty times had the French attacked, thirty attacks and more had the Germans beaten off, with the sappers in it all the time, but neither side were any further forward for all that. And now August was drawing to an end. At the very most there were six or eight dry weeks yet to come. Then a fresh foe would descend upon the contending forces—rain.

Up and down they paced, Kroysing always on the captain's left, and carefully changing sides when the other turned. His somewhat long hair grew damp with sweat; he dried it with his hand, wiped his hand on his breeches, and went on. He, Kroysing, had been in this show since the end of January, and none knew better than he the viscous filth, the piercing desolation, boundless and bottomless, into which that land of clay had been transformed. The morale of the fighting troops was now being sapped mainly by the savage bombardments, the deadlock in the battle, and the appalling losses. No food or ammunition could be got up to the line without heavy casualties; there were no reliefs, and reinforcements arrived decimated, scattered, and with quivering nerves. And then there was not one decent dugout in the whole front line where they could sleep in safety. The only safe place in the whole neighbourhood was old Uncle Douaumont. And even though Franz did heave a few across at it now and again, the point was that it did now lie three kilometres behind the actual battle grounds, and that made all the difference. But

when the rain came—what would happen then? Could the troops hold on?

Captain Lauber sniffed angrily. “Hr-rm,” he snorted, “you don’t say so!” Kroysing’s didactic tone and the urgency with which he spoke stirred the spirit of contradiction within him. But he was a fair-minded man; without an exact knowledge of every wrinkle in the ground, and without the suggestions of the trench officers, the brass hats had no material for their decisions. For they sat at the rear, and the more exalted they were, the further to the rear they sat—in that matter Hannibal and Cæsar were far superior to our glorious times. “Very well, young man, and what would you propose? Out with it!” “Strengthen the Douaumont garrison by a whole Army Service Corps battalion,” replied Kroysing with an abstracted, meditative air, his eyes fixed upon the tips of his boots, as he kicked at a worm-eaten windfall apple. Douaumont was large, there was plenty of space, and it was safe. Not one crack in the casemates or in the vaulting of the long passageways. Only the upper works were demolished, the brick masonry, escarpments, enclosures, and earthworks. But the concrete stood. Two or three thousand heavy-calibre shells had fallen on it since February 21, but the French mining engineers were men who knew their job.

Captain Lauber puffed savagely at his pipe. He must look into this. After all, this was his profession, he himself was a mining engineer in uniform, and he had been three times in Douaumont, but only in the upper works and in the eastern armoured tower, never below. Had Lieutenant Kroysing ever measured the thickness of the vaulting? Kroysing shook his head. The weather had never been quiet enough for that—too much iron flying about. But he estimated the concrete roof a good nine feet thick. It would create rather a good impression, he thought, if the Herr Captain came to inspect his sappers’ little depot over yonder and took some measure-

ments at the same time.—Captain Lauber's eyes flashed. It was a very good idea to put a few more hundred labour men into Douaumont, to relieve the fighting troops. Of course with their own staff and company and battalion leaders. There were a great many gentlemen sitting around behind the lines who did themselves very well and didn't realize that the Lord had dropped them into a soft job. His men had long since been turned into complete front-line soldiers, though they still did the jobs of sappers, hauling up wire and trench-props and ammunition, digging trenches almost like infantry, and coming under fire just as they did. Eberhard Kroysing listened with malicious pleasure to what he could not have expressed any better himself. Was Captain Lauber aiming at any definite person? Of whom did he want to be rid? That he would not be likely to reveal; gentlemen of the staff do not like exposing their cards. (As a matter of fact it was Herr Jansch who had appeared before Captain Lauber's inner vision; that pompous political bore, whom he had once ousted from Lille, appeared and again disappeared. It would not work this time, alas. The artillery—his friend Reinhart—were too much in need of men. Pity.) Clicked at the first attempt. "My fellows are working with a Bavarian battalion that I have in mind. Its staff is billeted in Mangiennes, and the companies rather further forward, or, to put it better, not so far behind." And as he carelessly picked an apple from a high branch, flung it in the air, and caught it again: "Anyhow some of them are already posted in reserve within reach of the fort and in the direction of Poivres ridge and could stay there. But the main body will have to spend all the next few weeks in building dry dugouts on the higher slopes, with pumps and waste-pipes. "We'll get into touch with the infantry and settle on suitable spots within the next week. Meantime the Herr Captain might put through a request for the Niggl battalion, and cheer up the officers with



the prospect of decorations and promotions. "They'll keep quiet and do as they're told," said Captain Lauber. In any case the staff billets in the rear, the peacetime aspect of the echelon administration, made bad blood among the front-liners. What were men likely to think, who had been rushed from place to place for four or five months at the front, withdrawn exhausted, reinforced, and flung into the line again, if they happened to get a look round behind the lines and saw how people lived there? "We know, of course, how they keep up the morale of the troops. But it's not good for the troops to see the process from too close at hand."

The two officers eyed each other. This was a matter on which silence was indeed golden. They thought of the army commander, Crown Prince and Kaiser's son, who only the other day, when fighting units were moving up to the line, had appeared in white tennis clothes and waved them greetings with his racket. Such scenes were photographed, hawked about to newspapers, and a good many officers had thought them very odd.

Captain Lauber sighed. He was a good soldier, ready to stake his all on a German victory. Lieutenant Kroysing had chosen the right moment to take his leave. He could of course have the car to take him as far as it could towards his fox's hole. A great part of the neighbourhood lay under long-distance fire.

When the death sentence, written on an insignificant sheet of paper, reached Captain Niggel, to the effect that he was to exchange his pleasant billet at Mangiennes for Douaumont, he at first could hardly believe his eyes. An A.S.C. battalion possesses no staff; a sergeant and a couple of clerks are all the personnel allowed for the discharge of business. Moreover, Herr Niggel, as a Royal Bavarian official, liked to be the first to see the correspondence that came into the battalion. There he sat in a comfortable house jacket that could barely be described as a uniform, at peace with God, his patron saint Aloysius,

and himself, glaring at the half-sheet of scribbled paper, signed by Captain Lauber on behalf of the O.C. Sappers, which was to send him, Niggl, to his death. What was this? he thought, clutching at his heart, his beer-sodden Bavarian heart. It couldn't be true. He, a captain in the Landsturm, a family man, with two young children, and a buxom wife, Kreszenzia née Handschuh. It must be one of those mistakes that happened so often in the war. Men were no more than men, and such mistakes were easily made. However, he would go and have a talk with Captain Lauber. He knew the Württemberger, and he would soon get this affair put straight. He folded up the order, put it away in his shabby doeskin pocket-book, which he slipped into his pocket. No one need see it for the present. It is easier to avert a peril that has not been discussed.

He drove there in a mood of carefully assumed indifference, and with a confident look in the sly eyes above the puffy cheeks. Back he came, in the guise of a man who has had to look life in the face. Lauber had grown purple with anger—filthy little Swabian swine. What did he think?—Captain Lauber had roared. Was he merely here to be ornamental, to give tone to the proceedings? Herr Captain Niggl was not quite so handsome as all that. And did he think he was the only father of a family in the German army, eh? He had better keep a stiff upper lip and try and set a good example to his men. A soldier always fought better when he saw his officer, who pouched a good deal more monthly pay than he did, sharing his dangers at any rate. At 3 A.M. on the morning of the second day he would start out with his third company; the sapper depot at Douaumont would provide him with guides. Henceforward he was under the orders of that depot; he would be transferred to the Tenth Corps, and rank as on the strength of the Douaumont garrison; here was an opportunity of distinguishing himself, and seeing a little life. Anyway, the war would

not be over today or tomorrow, and a life assurance was not issued to any German officer, whether he was billeted in Mangiennes, Damvillers, or Douaumont. The fourth company would remain behind and take over all railway troops; the second and the first would move up to Douaumont as soon as they were needed for the work in hand, which was the construction of dry dugouts for the infantry. These constituted the backbone of any defence, and the job might well bring him a decoration. Yes, there was no help for it, he, Alois Niggel, of Weilheim, Upper Bavaria, must give way and cast himself for a hero's part.

Faint moonlight, the crescent in its second quarter had not risen until nearly midnight. In profound silence three columns of A.S.C., heavily laden with knapsacks, entrenching tools, and various packages and boxes, were moving through Spincourt wood. They knew the roads, having themselves kept them in repair; the wood, beeches in soil that was very moist, was strangely thick, in places wrecked by shellfire, and in places quite undamaged, according to the convolutions of the front line and the position of the gun emplacements. The men looked pale and desperate; the lips of many were quivering so much that they could not smoke; many a country lad was saying his rosary; only a couple of blustering young townsmen talked as if they did not care. The skyline still hid Hill 310, under which, at the junction of the road to Bezonvaux, they were to meet their guides about 3 A.M. Every man of those marching columns wished he could prolong the time until then—lengthen every minute, or interject fresh subdivisions of time. None of them had enjoyed the change, nor the fresh damp air after the heat of the day before. They conceived of Douaumont as a volcano in whose entrails they were now to be engulfed. Rumours had reached them of a terrible explosion inside it, as a result of which more than a thousand men had perished, no one



knew how. They had been told this by the sappers, the foremen of their labours, whose quarters they were now to share. Many of them pretended they knew further details of the disaster, which might happen again any day. An entire battalion of dead, said the sappers. So no one was in a hurry to put one foot before the other.

About three o'clock their eyes had long since grown accustomed to the half-light. For half an hour each man had been sitting by the roadside on his box or his bursting pack, which two rolled blankets, an overcoat, and a pair of boots had swollen into shapelessness. Dully they listened to the din that reached their ears from beyond Hill 310, above which faint red and white reflections flashed and passed. Then appeared three tall gaunt forms, with steel helmets and the little gas-mask drums as their sole equipment, and rough walking-sticks cut from branches in their hands. They eyed with sympathy the vast packs of the A.S.C. men; an N.C.O. reported to Captain Niggel, who had already sent his horse back. The sappers took their places at the head of each line, and they proceeded at a goose-step along the trampled footpaths. The dark sky was mirrored in the shell-holes. The Bavarians stamped on step by step, leaning on their spades. The sappers seemed to radiate confidence among those that came behind. They did not need to worry; surely, nothing could happen at that time of day; the infantry were fed up with fighting, and so was Franz—long ago. And the dead that were mouldering before Souville, by the lines of Thiaumont, and round the ruins of Fleury would bite no more. The way led downhill, and a broad ravine gave them a brief view of the horizon lit by the pallid glare of rockets, while the machine-guns rattled like sewing-machines. The rear files had to be continually stumbling and panting forward, so as not to be left behind and overtaken by daylight. Odours, foul and fragrant, were borne upon the night wind, and formless patches of blackness deepened the brooding twilight all about them; the slanting moonlight

filled the shell-holes with lights and shadows. Then a towered peak, which seemed to rise higher as they marched, barred their vision, and they climbed up its flank as the first breeze of morning made the wearied men shiver. That was Hill 388, said the sappers, the long rampart pitted by shellfire, that was a rampart no more. In the shadows of the great arched gateway of shattered brickwork shored up by sandbags, stood a tall figure with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head. Two quizzical eyes surveyed the advancing column.

What sort of smell reached those reluctant noses? The smell of ruined masonry, human excrement, stale explosive, and dried blood.





**BOOK THREE**  
**IN A HOLLOW HILL**





## CHAPTER I: WILD BOAR VALLEY

LIKE a troop of horses plunging their necks into the river to drink, the Meuse heights marched down on the right and left into the curves of the gushing stream. They were outliers from the Argonne ranges, these Meuse heights, rounded hills, or high plateaux running from west to east. Green was the land, green and rich in streams, which filled the valleys with marshy woodland; among the tall-stemmed beeches, alders, and ash trees, in a multitudinous undergrowth of blossoming shrubs and briers, the wild pig wallowed and the duck made its nest. Villages had come into being by the few tracks across the cleared uplands; mills had risen beside the streams; and the peasants of Lorraine, industrious and skilful farmers, grew fruit and corn, raised cattle and horses. The land between the Moselle and the Meuse had for a thousand years been fertile and productive; Celts and Romans and Franks had brought it to subjection; and it marched with a wealthy neighbour, the green and white country of Champagne.

For fifteen hundred years the city of Verdun had guarded the crossing of the Meuse, where the river forks and forms a natural rampart. The citadel lies couched above the old churches and monasteries, with their grave rounded windows and pious pointed arches. Its streets swarmed with the life of a French provincial town that turns the products of a fertile countryside into manufactures. Some fifteen thousand people lived by the labour of their hands and the ingenuity of brains that had for so many centuries been civilized; they produced embroideries, sweetmeats, linen goods; they smelted metals and made machines and furniture. They fished in the backwaters,

prayed before flower-decked altars, took their *apéritifs* or their coffee, went in ceremonious array to weddings, while countless fair-haired and dark-haired children played in the streets and courtyards.

The city was surrounded by a ring of entrenched forts, in several lines, some modern and some of older date. For over against the city, far away to the east and yet menacingly near, rose the colossus of the German Reich, which owed allegiance to the glorification of war. In 1792 and again in 1870 the fortress of Verdun had known the German guns, and the spiked helmets of her troops. In 1914 the third onslaught threatened; it was averted by the victory of the French army on the Marne, by the help of the English and of the Maid of Orleans, who had so loved her home in the Lorraine country near Domrémy.

On February 21, 1916, after intensive preparation, shells hurtled into the streets of the city, struck down citizens, split the skulls of children, and flung old women down their stairs; fire and smoke and tumult and destruction. Aircraft bombs whistled down upon the quarters that were out of reach of the long-range guns. Over a thousand guns, seven hundred of them heavy and the very heaviest, spat day and night torrents of steel and thunder on the sector chosen for attack: the right bank of the Meuse, the eastern bank, the district between Consenoye and the Woëvre plateau, an arc open to the south-west, thirty kilometres across. Then the German divisions—from holes and trenches full of icy slime—burst forth to the attack. In spite of the surprise on which they had reckoned, the men of the Mark and Hesse and Westphalia, the Lower Silesians, the Posen Grenadiers, and the Thuringian Landwehr met with resistance everywhere. The resistance of the ground, sodden with snow, and of the water-logged shell-holes; resistance from the thick woods, silent companies of auxiliaries, linked like Gaulish troops by creeping plants, indefatigable briars, and blackberry hedges; the resistance of fortified field

positions, blockhouses, and wire entanglements; the resistance of the French infantry, chasseurs, and artillerymen. After the first four days, the first week, the world knew that the surprise attack on Verdun had failed. Six army corps, almost two hundred thousand Germans, had advanced to the assault, but they had not sufficed. Although the fall of Douaumont made the world listen, and gave the Germans a sense of victory, they had not really achieved it. The fortress of Verdun was not to be surprised.

The Germans refused to accept this result. Their troops had done deeds that surpassed the legends of centuries. They had stormed woods, taken hills and ridges, cleared blockhouses, and driven the enemy out of many a valley. They had braved the leaden hail of shrapnel, the steel knives of the shell-splinters, and in set and savage fury, spurred on to do and die, they plunged their bayonets into French bodies and flung their hand-grenades. The advance troops had looked down from the ridge of Souville, beyond Douaumont, upon the roofs of the suburbs of Verdun. One more effort, said the commander, and we have it. They said it in March, in April; they said it in May and June, and until the middle of July; and then they said it no more. The troops did not know why they got no further. They were relieved and put into the line elsewhere, lost hosts of their men, were reinforced, and the drafts grew younger every time. It was not their fault that the fortress of Verdun still held. At the hour ordained they stumbled out of their shattered lines; the sweating gunners, half deafened by their own detonations, laboured at the guns; the infantry, as they had been taught to do, flung themselves against the French trenches and shell-holes, took them, and dealt havoc with French flesh and blood, offering up their own the while, their flesh and blood, their sweat and nerves, their brains and their endurance, their courage and their presence of mind. They had all been told that they were here defending their own homes and they believed it. And also that the French



were exhausted—one more effort, one more blow! They made that effort, they struck that blow. Cook-house orderlies fell as they carried up the rations; lorry-drivers were killed as they drove, while the gunners served their guns under a hurricane of counter-fire. Fresh troops were brought up to the attack: Bavarian divisions, Prussian Guard. Württemberg infantry, regiments from Baden and Upper Silesia. Then at last it became clear that the battle was over. Who had made the mistakes? And what mistakes had been made? More and more rounds of ammunition were hurled into the infinite; more and more men were shattered, killed, maimed, lost, and taken prisoner. A quarter of a million men had been sacrificed by the French army in the defence of Verdun, including nearly seven thousand officers, while the German army had lost even more. The lovely little villages had first been ruined, then wrecked, until they were finally no more than tumbled heaps of bricks; the woods, first gashed and tangled, were reduced to battlefields of pallid stumps, and finally to a desert. And this desert extended from Flabas and Moirey as far as beyond the village of Souville, across heights and valleys, all the length and breadth of it—a patch of white-flecked moon-landscapes, desert-hued, full of round cavities, on both banks of the Meuse. But the city of Verdun, under the protection of her forts, much shattered, still stood, while the battle swung back and forward all around her.

As August went on, Bertin of the A.S.C. began to feel at home in those desolate stretches that still figured on the map as Fosses wood, Chaume wood, and Wavrille wood. He had greatly changed since the beginning of July; he often looked unshaven and even bristly, but his face was now deeply tanned and much more set, and in the expression of his eyes behind his spectacles there was something much more thoughtful and mature; for the past two months had plunged him, much against his will, into a whirl of events, and they, together with his

meditations on the departed Kroysing, and the sight of these boundless fields of tree corpses to which he had become so entirely accustomed that his foot instinctively avoided the numberless steel-splinters, had shaped and moulded him in mind and body. He had been under fire on various occasions, and had run away from shells and shrapnel or, quite as often, into them. But he had faith in his luck. Well, it stood written that he was to feel something very different and much more hirsute against his skin and in his conscience, before he reached an insight into reality.

One day, in the middle of Fosses wood, he heard his name called from the far end of the ravine. He was on his knees at the moment screwing down a couple of rails on a stretch of field railway used for bringing ammunition to the fifteen-inch siege guns; he shouted in astonishment: "Hullo?"

A young soldier strolled up to him, a sapper N.C.O., with a faded Iron Cross ribbon in his buttonhole, and his hands in his trouser pockets. He surveyed Bertin with questioning looks; his eyes twinkled in his long thin face above a small snub nose, like the piercing eyes of an animal; indeed little Sergeant Süssmann looked just like a knowing ape, who appears every now and again, peers about him, and vanishes; his puttees were all awry, and he was not wearing a belt. With a cigarette in the corner of his mouth he squatted down beside Bertin. "It wasn't easy to find you," he said. "There," said Bertin, with a final wrench at the spanner, "I can't screw it any tighter." He was thankful he had learnt the use of this sort of implement in his father's workshop; he had come to be regarded as quite a handy man. Sergeant Süssmann put out his hand; the fishplate lay firmly against the two sleepers. "All right," said he, "but that's not what I came for. I'm to take you to the lieutenant." "Which one?" asked Bertin. Süssmann eyed him. "To my Lieutenant Kroysing, of course. It wasn't so easy to find where you were; you hadn't told him your name." Bertin got up. "Are you



one of his lot?" "Yes." They stepped down to the next section of rail, picking some fishplates and nuts out of a sack. "It doesn't improve the hands," said Bertin, surveying his fingers, "but it suits me better than the neighbourhood of an orderly room." He knelt down again on the ground; Süssmann screwed down the other fishplate, as though he were not Private Bertin's "superior." A gust of wind drove a whirl of yellowing leaves over their heads. "And what does he think now about his brother—I suppose you know all about it?" "He's pretty sick, I fancy," replied Süssmann. "Apparently he's made up his mind about a few things; otherwise his brother's company and the battalion staff wouldn't be lying in Douaumont at this moment." Bertin eyed him blankly. "Captain Niggel?" "Is now living in Douaumont. It's just his luck. There's a large garrison in Douaumont. It's a father's house in which there are many mansions. Well, the lieutenant wants you to be present when the letter is read." "And my company?" interjected Bertin doubtfully. Sergeant Süssmann spat out his cigarette-end. "Lieutenant Kroysing is a big noise hereabouts, and the nearer to the front you get, the bigger he becomes. Even your Panjes know that. The only question is whether you'd stick it. Douaumont and the approaches to it count as quite a peaceful spot just now. Though certainly our ideas aren't your ideas." "How do you know?" retorted Bertin. "I've been more than a year in the line, and fifteen months with the Prussians, so you can judge whether I'm ambitious." Bertin laughed; the "old hands" with their caps awry and their slouching movements were very seldom shirkers. "Well, if need be, I dare say I could stand life with your lot; but—how am I to get there?" "We'll ask for you," replied Süssmann, and he explained what it was proposed to do in Bertin's case. All the field railways in the neighbourhood—and they were not a few—were run by the sapper depot. The men who served them were housed partly in dugouts and partly in corrugated iron huts. All through August they

had had a pretty rough time; now there would be a little peace and quiet and then some leave. A railway hut in Wild Boar valley, east of Bezonvaux, not far from the Ornes batteries of the heavy artillery ("and where they are you can be sure of a nice quiet time"), a temporary telephonist was needed. They had asked for one from Bertin's company, and had got one, a carpenter who was partially deaf, and whom the switchboard with its eight miserable plugs inspired with positive terror. The man had just been sent back. Bertin doubled up with laughter. That was just like old Karsch the carpenter. However, there were plenty of intelligent fellows in the company. "You won't get me, though. A Jew is never transferred; that would violate the Laws of Nature." "It's not a laughing matter," said Süssmann reproachfully. "Every Jew must be prepared at every moment to defend his equal rights." "You try to defend them against Jansch & Co.," said Bertin frowning; "there are ten of us Jews in the company, and none of them in an orderly room. Major Jansch is what is called a nationalist editor." "That won't help him," said Süssmann contemptuously. "Kroysing has asked for you, and for nobody else. A fortnight in the middle of a wood in a small hut, eight hours on duty, sixteen hours your own master. . . ." "I'm your man!" said Bertin. "Fifteen!" shouted Sergeant Böhne. From every side appeared men of the A.S.C. waving water-bottles and drinking cups, and swinging their haversacks (only the gas-mask in its little tin drum was never laid aside; gas shells were much in use). Bertin strolled towards his tunic, which was hanging from a shell-splinter sticking out of a tree about the height of a man's head, Süssmann still at his side. As they walked, Bertin inquired whether the hut was a very hot spot. Süssmann shook his head; the hut itself was never under fire, which was why it had been put up in that secluded corner; but sixty paces to the right and a hundred yards to the left Franz's range began. And he had used it pretty freely hitherto;

but since the Bavarians had taken Fumin and Chapître woods and the Alpine Corps had stormed Thiaumont, the French batteries had been moved back. Bertin took out of his haversack some ration bread, a knife, and a tin of artificial honey, a yellowish concoction manufactured from sugar. He offered the other some, but Süssmann shook his head in refusal. "I prefer a hot breakfast." So saying, he lit a fresh cigarette. "No butter?" he asked. "No fat substitute?" (Fat substitute was the name of a tasty preserve made from the fat and flesh of pigs' stomachs.) "'Supplies Exhausted,'" quoted Bertin from the notice that was put up on such occasions. "Well, you'll get everything you want at our place; compared with you we seem to do ourselves uncommon well." "How far is it to you?" asked Bertin. "If Franz isn't shooting, three-quarters of an hour. If he is, you'll have to wait till he stops. And never without your gas-mask." "We Jews have got used to eating very odd things," observed Bertin, chewing. "I've eaten everything in my time," said Süssmann, puffing at his cigarette. "So have I," said Bertin, "but fat substitute was not among them." "We'll be licking our fingers after it soon," said Süssmann; "this is going to be a bad winter." "How old are you really, Sergeant Süssmann, if I may ask?" "I got the sappers to take me on as a volunteer when I was sixteen and a half, so you can reckon up." Bertin poised his open knife on his knee and stopped chewing. "My boy," said he, "I took you for twenty-five." Süssmann grinned. "I've seen a thing or two. I'll tell you about it later on. Well then, you'll be applied for, so be ready to start early in the morning; ring us up about six. We have a direct line to you if it hasn't been shot away. Kroysing will be pleased. He seems to think quite a lot of you because you believed his brother right away." Bertin shook his head. "It wasn't much of an effort to believe him. Only a brother could have been so blind."

"Well, I'll be toddling off," said Süssmann, getting up and pulling his tunic straight. He spoke in the Berlin



dialect, which sounded so convincing and so took Bertin aback, that he laughed and said in the same accent: "Come from somewhere on the Spree, eh?" Süssmann saluted. "Right you are, sir. Berlin W., Regentenstrasse, Counsellor Süssmann. Tomorrow afternoon, then," and he nodded and slouched away, vanishing among the tree-trunks. Bertin watched him open-eyed; then he stretched himself out on the sun-warmed, trampled woodland earth, chewed his sweetened black bread, looked upwards into the blue, and sucked contentedly at an A.S.C. cigar. And as with a sense almost of joy he let the radiance of that golden sky soak into him, he reflected that hitherto nothing had been put upon him beyond what he was well able to bear. There he still lay, in a world of illusion; he had not yet seen the clenched fist of war as young Kroysing had seen it. And he thought, as he always did, with a thrill of admiration, of the elder brother, who had drawn those astute gentlemen, by the use of their own methods, within the radius of his power. The movements of life always proceeded in jerks. The war was gradually drawing him closer to itself. His next billet would be the Wild Boar valley, and after that Douaumont. Well, he was ready. A writer must not shrink before the net-casts of Fate. His eyes closed; he saw silver fish, their foolish mouths all open, swimming in the blue, all in one direction; the hand with the cigar dropped to the ground; nothing could happen to him; nothing could happen to the fish either. And he fell asleep.

Next day, at two o'clock in the afternoon, Bertin of the A.S.C. reported at his orderly room, ready to march. Some trouble had been taken to smarten him up; he had been provided with a belt to keep him together, and with one of those oil-cloth caps with a badge and a brass cross which had long been slumbering in a Prussian ordnance depot.

At the end of August it is hot in France, and Acting Sergeant Glinsky was longing for a nap. But he could not

deny himself the pleasure of bestowing a parting blessing on Bertin. With collar unbuttoned, gorged and blinking, he walked round the rigid figure planted on the floor. All was in order; grey trousers tucked into well-blackened boots, infantry tunic, haversack faultlessly packed, one boot on each side under the rolled-up overcoat and folded blankets. Then he sat himself genially down astride a chair. He knew, and Bertin knew, that had this order led to a village in the rear, the company would at least have tried to snaffle his luck, though he had been applied for by name; but it led to the front, and what the chances of life might be, no one could tell. If the sappers wanted this particular man as a telephonist—then by all means let him go. The company was not in direct touch with the sappers, and so did not know who had applied for him; by an arrangement that was jealously preserved, the co-operation between the two units was carried on exclusively through the artillery park, where again nothing was known about the experiences of the Kroysing family. “Stand at ease,” said Acting Sergeant Glinsky. “You are an educated man, so I need not waste my words.” (“Oh Lord,” thought Bertin, “soft soap—what can he be up to now?”) “You have some black marks to wipe off, so we hope you will do your job in a creditable manner.” And Bertin answered with military smartness; “Yessir.” In so replying he prepared himself for the little stab of malice that he knew must come, and he too hoped to put in a word that might remind Herr Glinsky of the hospital-leave to Billy that he had refused. “You may think yourself lucky,” proceeded Glinsky genially, “to get a fortnight’s quiet life at a switchboard. Well, mind you come back safe and sound. Your letters will be forwarded. We have your home address?” “Ah,” thought Bertin, almost with glee, “good old Glinsky.” This was a hinted inquiry for his next of kin in case he never came back. Bertin put on an impenetrable look, and said with cheerful concern: “Certainly, sir.” “It must have been a good friend of

yours," pursued Glinsky, with a confidential blink, "that fixed you up this little job. Sergeant Süssmann, I suppose?" This remark, too, was malicious in intent, suggesting as it did that Jew always stood by Jew, at any rate according to the opinion that men like Glinsky held of Jews. But this gave Bertin his cue. "No," he said, calmly gazing into Glinsky's eyes, those grey sleepy bulldog eyes, "I assume that it was Lieutenant Kroysing of the sapper depot at Douaumont that arranged it." That got home. The man astride the chair sat open-mouthed. "What is the lieutenant's name?" he asked, glaring up at Bertin. "Kroysing," repeated Bertin readily. "Eberhard Kroysing. The brother of a young sergeant who was killed in the middle of July." "And he's in command at Douaumont?" asked Glinsky still bewildered. "Certainly not, sir," replied Bertin, "only of the sapper unit attached to the garrison." He needed to say no more, for Glinsky had a quick understanding. So there was something behind the transfer of the Bavarians to Douaumont (which had naturally caused a good deal of surprise); well, now it was explained, though in rather a mysterious and disquieting fashion. "Dismiss!" he snarled abruptly. "You must find your own way." Bertin swung round and left the orderly room in high good humour. He had long since discovered how to get to his destination; with the trucks that brought up the short thick twenty-ones for the howitzers in the Ornes ravine. (Why, after Bertin's departure, the rationing of I/X/20 showed such remarkable improvement, no one of course knew: butter and Dutch cheese, and large pieces of meat for lunch—miraculous! And this marvellous state of affairs lasted for full five days. On the sixth and seventh the standard began to fall; and on the eighth, as nothing had happened, the old menu came into force once more: gristle and barbed wire (dried vegetables) and turnip marmalade, commonly known as Jam for Heroes.

At ten minutes past two Bertin dumped his haversack on the wooden floor of the telephone room at the artillery



park, and asked that his new duties might be explained to him. The telephonists of the Steinbergquell Ammunition Park proved very obliging. They had for days past been shaking with terror lest one of their number might have to take the place of the man on leave from Wild Boar valley; for them there were no secrets. Now that someone else had to make his way to that dreadful place, where shells were always dropping, their hearts were full of thankfulness. "It's just child's play, old chap. You've got your eight switches for the stations before you and behind you—with the sapper depot, the next exchange, and the artillery park—and anyone can show you in two minutes how to plug in. And it isn't dangerous; when the line gets shot away, it isn't you that has to mend it." They kindly concealed the fact that the new arrival might have to run to the sapper depot and report that the line had been blown up. "You'll find some men from your own country near by—Upper Silesians," said Telephonist Otto Schneider. Bertin cared little for the men of his own actual province; he had much more in common with the Bavarians and the men from Hamburg and Berlin; there was only one Silesian regiment in which he took an interest, the Fifty-Seventh, on active service, his brother's unit. Only the day before he had received a letter from his mother, in which the handwriting was tremulous with the fear lest Fritz Bertin might have ceased to exist. The lad had already been wounded in the previous autumn.

About three o'clock a message came in that the howitzer shells had been loaded up. Bertin slung his haversack over one shoulder, grasped his knotty stick, and ran downhill, replying genially to the mocking or inquisitive shouts of his more particular friends of the third company. For once everything was rosy; those left behind were glad because they were able to stay where they were, and Bertin was glad because he was going away. The Silesian gunners, gaunt men with drawn faces, were quite uncompromising. "Chuck your pack on to the saucepans, my lad, and bear

a hand," they said, with their rolling "r's" and high-pitched vowels. Bertin concealed his disappointment; he had not counted on having to help push the loaded trucks. And while, with some disgust, he eyed the stumpy, pointed shells that lay in the cradle-shaped trucks like sturdy infants, he realized with amazement that Glinsky had made no sort of impression on him at all—his mind was clear and unperturbed. This was something quite new.

In the middle of a deep desolate ravine the gunners had to turn off to the east, following the railway. Wild Boar valley, they said, opened out to the right; it was the third, and rather narrow, but recognizable as being especially green. He could not miss it. Bertin walked very quickly in spite of his haversack and greatcoat. For the first time he was quite alone under that barren sky, in the blazing sunlight. At any moment death might hurtle down upon him from the summer air. He must keep himself well in hand. He cursed his folly for agreeing to the transfer merely because he set store by Eberhard Kroysing's good opinion. There were tracks in all directions among the shell-holes; it was going to be fatally easy to lose his way. The lenses of his spectacles were clouded with sweat; he polished them with quivering hands. The deathly stillness frightened him; every sound that came from beyond the ridge frightened him; when an aeroplane appeared in the sky above him, his impulse was to throw himself flat on the ground—being too short-sighted to distinguish between French and German aircraft. So he hurried on, his teeth firmly clenched on his pipe, a humpbacked shadow following at his heels, just as one of his forebears in the times of Maria Theresa might have toiled from farm to farm in Austrian Silesia. He counted the ravines running up into the hills on his right; one already behind him, one opposite him, and two others still beckoning him on into the sunlit haze. He looked at his watch, as though that might offer him help, his heart throbbing under his burdens



and his solitude. If he had not been accustomed from his boyhood to meet and master the terrors of the mind, he would have turned back. But fortunately he had an order to fulfil. So he rested for a moment at the edge of the next shell-hole, drank a mouthful or two of lukewarm coffee out of his water-bottle, lit his pipe, and forced himself to breathe equably. Solitude, for which he had so longed, was now to encompass him. He cursed himself, and called himself a fool; he must be like a peasant from the country, groping his way for the first time among the turmoil of city traffic; frightened by the cars, the trams, and the hurrying people, he does not trust himself to ask his way, he feels as though he has fallen from the moon, and when at last he opens his mouth, he is right opposite his destination. So Bertin screwed up his eyes and shaded them with his hands; yonder, rather to the right, must be the entrance to Wild Boar valley. He set off at a trot, leaping down the slope, but slackened his pace when he reached the bottom, and found himself confronted by a vista of green confusion.

Heaped in wild disorder, hacked and gashed, with fearsomely mutilated stumps, corpses of trees covered the slope to his right, the leaves on the lopped branches now pale and yellow; and here and there a profusion of young shoots, dried hips and haws, a few beech saplings standing up like flagstaffs, and shell-holes in the woodland earth, white like bones. This must have been the effect of a German bombardment; the slope lay open towards the north. The southern side had been equally ravaged by the French; from the levelled expanse of ruin the aftergrowth here rose up to the sky, with larger, greener foliage. Suddenly there appeared before his nose a notice, with an arrow: "Wild Boar Valley! Lower part under enemy observation." At once relieved and perturbed, he broke into a trot again, among the upturned trees, and soon found himself on a footpath. In the next minute something screamed above his head; he flung

himself on his face, close to the fallen beech, as his pack bumped heavily on to his neck. A dull crash on the slope behind him, then another. He waited; no explosion. Duds, he thought with relief. The French were firing the new American ammunition, and it was no good; but the tearing, savage shriek of the shells had shaken him this time, and, covered with dirt and mire, he hurried on. The corpses of the trees made him shudder. How could such destruction ever be made good? After a minute the valley took a turn: forest, virgin and primeval.

The shadowed green of leaves encompassed him. Birds were twittering in the treetops. Beside the sun-flecked stems rose clumps of young saplings, thin as fingers or as children's arms, so tall that their foliage reached upwards into the light. Blackberry bushes, scattered with late blossom and rosy purple berries, thrust their brambles through the undergrowth. The slope of the hill was bright with a green array of sword-shaped lily-of-the-valley leaves, among a tangle of whitethorn and barberry, and feathered bracken flickering over moss and stones. It was a marvellous sight, a mountain forest that recalled his holiday wanderings at home. How good it was to dump his pack upon a stone, and with his stick between his legs to rest and think of nothing! The light breeze that blew between the tree-trunks was refreshing and cool.

Five minutes later Bertin ran into the track of the light railway, or a branch of it, and soon came upon a blockhouse with a corrugated iron roof. At last. He reported in military fashion to a corporal, a bearded man, who was sitting outside the door cutting a stick. "Ah, there you are," said the corporal equably, and his speech revealed him as a Badener, as was his comrade, who appeared barefooted and in shirtsleeves, delighted that the new third man had really arrived. Bertin was asked if he could play skat. He could play skat. They hoped he hadn't brought too many lice with him; he could keep himself clean here. Thank God, said Bertin. The two Landsturm men could

quite well have done the job on their own at a pinch. The telephone-box, which was kept in order by the railway service, had indeed only eight switches, but someone had to be awake day and night, in case a switch dropped. Bertin surveyed his new bed, hung his pack from a post, unrolled his blankets, and unpacked his possessions: his washing, smoking, and writing materials, and a photograph of his wife in a small round frame.

Just before six o'clock, by the corporal's instructions—his name was Friedrich Strumpf, park-keeper at Schwetzingen, not far from Heidelberg—he rang up the sapper depot at Douaumont. As he set his lips to the black shell, and asked to speak to Lieutenant Kroysing, the Badener eyed him with mistrust; the new fellow seemed to have grand acquaintances. After a while Sergeant Süssmann replied; the lieutenant sent his compliments, and he, Sergeant Süssmann, would come and fetch him on the following afternoon as soon as he could manage it. "Right," said Bertin; then he set himself to reassure his companions. He offered the Badeners a cigar told them how he had swum in the Neckar in the summer of 1914, and described the castle park of Schwetzingen, in which there was a mosque, wasn't there? Built by the Prince Elector, and some marvellous birds in an aviary—and surely there was a Chinese pavilion and a little marble bath—and in five minutes he had so won Strumpf the park-keeper's heart that he positively beamed. He showed Bertin a photograph of his two children, a boy with a school satchel and a ten-year-old girl with a cat in her arms, and talked to him about his third, a fair-haired, freckled lad, called Killian, employed in a tobacco factory at Heidelberg, who was irritable and argumentative, and could not stand opposition, but was a good fellow when you took him in the right way.

That afternoon Bertin learnt what his duties would be, what were the batteries he could hear booming near by, when the French fired and in what direction, and how the land really lay: Douaumont to the south-west behind



them; to the north-east, beyond the great ravine, the Ornes valley; and Bezonvaux, or what was so called, almost exactly to the east. Towards the left the French were operating a railway gun battery, and three-quarters of an hour to the front lay the light field howitzers, from which they often got their post; the gunners brought it up with the ammunition. If they didn't show up for a couple of days, one had to ask for it. They were awkward sort of chaps, Poles from the Russian borders, who twittered like bats, but their lieutenant was a decent fellow, and was bored to death there. A man by the name of Schanz.

As they sat at supper—tea laced with rum, and toast with rashers of bacon—and Bertin held his slice of bread spitted on a twig over the fire, pandemonium had broken loose above the roof; guns—they boomed and sang and screamed, they gurgled and they rattled and they clanged, again, again, and yet again. The two Badeners did not even look up; the evening blessing of the fifteens, on its way towards Thiaumont and further. A repulsive noise, an outrage upon nature, announcing its evil origin from afar. Bertin of the A.S.C. sat and listened with a heavy heart. But he did not hear the sound of implements made by human hands, for the scope and use of which men were responsible. For him it was a primeval force that roared above his head, like an avalanche, for which natural laws were responsible, not men. The war, projected and maintained by human agency, appeared to him more and more as in the guise of a storm decreed by fate, a release of malignant elements, not amenable to judgment nor accountable to anyone.

## CHAPTER II: A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE

SUDDENLY, at noon on the following day, Erich Süssmann appeared, looked about him with those piercing eyes of his, and promised the Badeners that he would send back the new arrival in good time. The way past the field howitzers? Right. They strode off as though starting off on a country walk, crossed the field railway and the stream on a plank bridge, marched down the slope through the undergrowth and bushes, dappled with light and shadow, turned into a valley to the right, suddenly surrounded by a wild confusion of shattered woodland, and made their way along a sort of cattle track half-way down the slope that led down into the valley beside the line. Sergeant Süssmann knew all these woods by name, the Vauche wood far behind them, Moyemont where they were then walking, and further on Hassoule with its ravines. Each one of them had cost streams of blood, in the exact sense of that phrase, German and French. They turned off on to a narrow path, and immediately Bertin gripped Süssmann's shoulder. "Look! A Frenchman." A few paces ahead a blue-grey figure stood with his back to them, his steel helmet tilted on to his neck, huddled against the bushes as though he must step out at any moment. Süssmann laughed shortly. "Lord, yes—the Frenchie. He stands here as a signpost to the field howitzers. You don't need to worry about him, he's dead as any man could be." "Isn't he going to be buried?" asked Bertin with horror. "I say, old chap, what are you thinking of—the Bible or the *Antigone*? A signpost was needed hereabouts, and this was the first that offered." Bertin looked aside as they passed the murdered corpse, pinned to a truncated tree by a long shell-splinter. Bertin felt ashamed in the pres-

ence of the dead man. He felt an almost irresistible impulse to strew dust on his helmet and his shoulders, and give him back to Mother Earth. His eyes scanned the fleshless face and the withered hands. Great God, he thought, perhaps a young father; he carried his little son on those shoulders when he was last on leave. Silently he trotted along beside Süssmann. They unexpectedly came upon some piles of ammunition, covered with green tarpaulins. To the left, below the path, the railway line reappeared; a few steps further on amid the wreckage of the trees, the heavy barrel of a gun slanted upwards, its mounting wedged fast into the ground. Here for the first time Bertin saw the piles of felled tree-trunks roped together, padded with sandbags, and camouflaged by canvas printed in geometrical designs of blue and brown and green. A heap of empty shell cases lay rusting near at hand, useless mass of scrap iron. They were challenged, and Süssmann spoke to the guard, who was strolling about without a rifle. Bertin gathered that the post had not arrived—it might come on the following day. The hard Upper Silesian speech sounded almost unrecognizable from the gaunt soldier's stubby lips.

At last the hillside towered above them to the fort, like a mountain with a fragment ripped off by an explosion. Even in dreams Bertin had never seen such a spectacle. Like a piece of diseased skin under a microscope, the earth displayed its cankered and corroded wounds. It looked scorched and porous, threaded by a vein-like network of torn roots. In one shell-hole lay a bundle of spoiled hand-grenades, thrown no doubt for safety into the standing water at the bottom. Fragments of stuff fluttered from heaps of barbed wire—a sleeve with its buttons, cartridge cases, the remains of a machine-gun belt—human excrement everywhere, and piles of tin boxes, but not a human limb to be seen. With relief he mentioned this to Süssmann. The latter waved a hand. "There were plenty of dead hereabouts at the beginning of April; but the stink of



'em was more than we could stand. So we puddled them into the bigger shell-holes." "And how long have you been here?" asked Bertin in astonishment. "Oh, all the time," laughed Süssmann. "First we took the place, then came the grand bust-up; after that I was away for a week or two, and then I came back again." "The bust-up?" asked Bertin, rather mystified. "The explosion," replied Süssmann. "It's an odd world, I tell you. I was pretty nearly dead, but that wasn't half so bad. What worries me is—why? For whose benefit are we doing all this?" Bertin stopped to get his breath. Every answer that went through his head seemed impossible; in such a place every word seemed to ooze with rancid pathos. "Yes, my lad," said his little guide mockingly, "that's a question that brings you up short, doesn't it? People like you always give me the feeling that you've fallen out of a balloon and need a little information about the planet on which you're hopping about now." "Any information thankfully received," said Bertin, quite unoffended; "if the Frenchies give us time." "Why shouldn't they?" said Süssmann with a snort. "They're as fed up as we are. They won't stir a finger."

The approach became something like a feat of climbing, and Bertin's stick did good service. As they stepped across the drawbridge, and passed the wire entanglements—the trenches were scattered with contorted fragments of iron gratings, their spikes bent and twisted by direct hits—Bertin sniffed the mouldy smell of wrecked brickwork and all manner of strange substances. Süssmann laughed. "That's the Douaumont smell—so that we won't forget the place." The sentry had not challenged them. "When you see an officer, salute. We're all on duty here, my little man." "I can't see anything at all yet," replied Bertin, his voice echoing down the dark tunnel. Vaulted passages opened out to the right and left, with rows of lit electric bulbs in the ceilings. "We're in the north-west wing," said Süssmann. "At the end of March, Franz was

pretty near dancing on our heads, but he didn't quite pull it off." A.S.C. men passed them, carrying bundles of all sorts of implements; a couple of mud-spattered sappers nodded to Süßmann. "They've come in to get a spot of sleep; we've turned ourselves into beasts that walk by night. Well, there seem no limits to what human animals can stand." "And what's your job?" asked Bertin. "Field railways, of course. A nice job too. Not much doing today. Later on I'll be taking you back, and tomorrow morning I'm going to call on your little friends at Fosses wood." "Well, give them my love," laughed Bertin.

The sapper depot occupied a half-wing of the huge five-angled fortress. No smoking was allowed; here were stored other matters besides barbed wire, trench-props, and iron spikes. Bertin glanced in passing at an array of two-handled wicker baskets, like gigantic arrow-quivers, in which the heavy hand-grenades were slung head downwards. Crates of flares all bright and new reminded him of the crates of powder in his own artillery park. An unshaven sergeant was issuing rockets to some infantrymen, carefully numbering out the cartridges on to a plank laid across two small casks. Behind him a door stood open, revealing a glimpse of zinc containers in a white-washed cellar. "Oil for flame-throwers," said Süßmann. "You seem pretty well supplied here," said Bertin admiringly. "Resurrection stores," said Süßmann. "We take up a good bit of the old coalhole, don't we?" Far behind, in the uncertain light, the Bavarian A.S.C. men were handing in their tools. "They're in for twelve hours' rest," said Süßmann. "The lieutenant takes devilish good care they don't do any fatigues in their free time. Captain Niggl can't make it out." "And how deep down are we here?" "Deep enough for Sunday and Monday," answered Süßmann. "There are three yards of concrete above our heads, not to mention a whole barrack, armoured towers, machine-gun emplacements—every convenience, as you might say. This is our lieutenant's billet."



Bertin stepped into a vaulted chamber and stood to attention. Lieutenant Kroysing was sitting by a broad embrasure, facing a bricked wall split by two direct hits. "A grand view," he laughed as he welcomed Bertin; "I can even see a bit of blue sky." Bertin thanked the lieutenant for getting him such a pleasant job. The other nodded; he had not done it out of pure kindness of heart, but to ensure the survival of at least one man who could explain the whole affair to Judge-Advocate Mertens at Montmédy. It would be Bertin's business to clear Sergeant Kroysing's good name. "My father will get over Christoph's death, and over my death, if I go west. We're all marching the same way home. Only—there must be no fear nor favour. If it gets about in Bavaria—and there has been talk—that a Kroysing escaped a court martial only by getting killed, it will be a fearful blow to the family pride, and that he must be spared." Bertin eyed the tanned and sallow face that looked more haggard than ever before. It was loathsome, he said in an undertone, to have to engage in a private conflict with human villainy. Eberhard waved this aside. Not at all; it was the good old game of revenge; and in that moment his face looked to Bertin as merciless as the seamed and pitted earth outside.

The daylight in the room was dim; Sergeant Süssmann brought in a dish full of warm water. Lieutenant Kroysing opened a drawer and produced two sheets of white blotting paper, which it had taken him more than a fortnight to procure. Then with long slender fingers he unwrapped his brother's letter from a white handkerchief and dipped it in the water. Three heads close together, two dark and one fair, watched while a pink, then reddish colouring oozed through the water and settled on the bottom of the dish. "Take care," said Süssmann; "please leave the operation to me." "Operation is good," Kroysing growled sardonically.

Unfolding the letter without destroying the paper or washing away the ink was a delicate performance; the

timing had to be exact. The dead man had used a field postcard letter; a sheet on which both sides could be used as well as the inner side of the envelope, which was then gummed down. Süßmann cautiously rocked the letter back and forward; suddenly the whole of the water became tinged with brown. "Shall I pour it away?" he asked. "I wish," said Kroysing, "we could pour it down a certain person's throat." Süßmann in silence emptied the basin into a bucket and poured fresh water over the letter, of which the gummed edges had begun to loosen; the third water remained clear, and the sheets, laid between blotting-paper revealed a script that was only slightly faded. "Excellent ink," said Kroysing, tonelessly. "The youngster liked to see the writing stand out on the page. Shall I read it out?" So far, so good, thought Bertin, with a catch of his breath. Who would have thought it possible?

"'My dearest Mother,'" read Eberhard Kroysing. "'Forgive my bothering you with my troubles in a letter. Up till now I've been describing my position in rather rosier terms than was justified. You have always brought us up to tell the truth, and never to be turned away from doing what we thought was right; fearing God more than man, you called it. And though, as you know, I no longer believe in God, I haven't forgotten what was implanted in us as children. Last April I wrote a letter to Uncle Franz describing how our N.C.O.'s let the men go short while they lived on the best of everything. Uncle Franz knows how important it is for the men's morale that they should not feel any sense of injustice. It is what he would call a damned disgrace. This letter was opened by the censor. Papa will tell you how a court martial inquiry was started, not against the N.C.O.'s, but against me, and our battalion managed to get the inquiry held up. I was promptly shifted here and kept here—and it's a pretty hot spot, I can tell you. Dearest Mother, I hated to have to write that last sentence. You'll be worrying your life

out and not be able to sleep at nights. Now do be sensible. I have been living in this position for the last two months in this cellar of a great farmhouse, and nothing has happened to me; from which you may see that it isn't so bad as all that. Still, I might stop one in the end. So please wire at once to Uncle Franz. He must get me brought up before the court martial at Montmédy. He must give the court martial my exact address, for I suspect that Captain Niggel has reported my "whereabouts unascertainable," or something of the kind.' ("Good guess, my lad," muttered the elder brother, and turned over the leaf.) " 'He mustn't let himself be put off, he must telephone to the court martial without delay, and back me up thoroughly. He needn't be afraid. I am just the same as I was when I joined up as a cadet two years ago. But I just couldn't let this go on and say nothing. I tried to get Eberhard into it, but he is terribly taken up with his work—you know where he is and what he is doing—and, as an officer, he can't get mixed up in my affairs. Indeed, I haven't heard from him for a couple of weeks. I'm not sending this letter to you direct, but through a friendly A.S.C. fellow (he was at Munich University) whom I met for the first time today. And now, my dearest Mother, do the best you can and do it quickly, like the good kind soul you are. We give you a lot of trouble, I know. But when the war is over and we are back again, then you will know what a grand thing it is to be alive and together. A great deal of humbug has been brought to light in all this business, and not before it was time, and we shall have to start afresh so as to avoid a repetition of what we now see with our own eyes, do with our own hands, and suffer in our own bodies. But parents and children—our love for you, and your love for us, this has proved true to its promise, this, we know, will never fail, and with that I will close. Always your devoted son, Christoph. P.S. Greetings to Papa. It is about time he wrote to me.' "



### A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE

The two listeners were silent. The faint rum daily artillery fire shook the closed windows. considered," observed Eberhard Kroysing, care the letter between fresh sheets of blotting-paper considered, we sit as deep beneath the earth as of this letter lies. With one slight difference than Captain Niggel a good deal of trouble."

Suddenly Bertin ducked; a sharp shrill scream shattering crash near by, the echoes deadened thickness of the walls; and then another. "A sort of thing to help on the good work," said with a smile.

### CHAPTER III: CAPTAIN NIGGL

CAPTAIN NIGGL, in a mingled state of exaltation and disgust, after the company had marched in, lay down to sleep on an iron bedstead, which, however, to his infinite relief, had been placed under a whitewashed vaulting of most reassuring thickness. "It's a pretty safe shop, Douaumont, isn't it?" he kept on asking the commandant's adjutant. Well, there was a good solid block of cement above his head. When he had slept here in comfort for a couple of weeks, he would certainly get the Iron Cross, First Class, and become an important man in his home town for all time, and not only in Weilheim, either. Such were his meditations. He had seen the rank and file of the third company, who were billeted in a vast underground casemate in the same wing, served out with hot coffee, bread, and dripping after their night march, and settled down to a tolerable night's sleep on their wired bunks and wood-wool mattresses, so as to be fresh to clean out their new abode as their first fatigue. But that very morning Franz had indicated that it was unwise to compare their new abode with their last. While searching for a latrine, Privates Michael Bass and Adam Wimmerl found themselves in a large enclosure open to the south, which it was better not to enter at certain times; and as they were looking for a place to squat, the first morning shell from a long-range battery familiar to the garrison blew them to bits. This caused a good deal of alarm and seemed to the captain a portent that lay heavy on his chest. Indeed, many things lay heavy on his chest. The air was unwholesome; the tunnels, in contrast to those in the other wings, were black with soot. The electric con-

nexions were newly laid; a side tunnel was completely blocked by a wall, which, though nearly new, was partly constructed of older fragments and debris. The echoes in the underground passages were deafening, and the work was extremely unpleasant; blasting operations during artillery duels, and trench-digging, while talking and smoking were strictly forbidden though the French line lay almost three miles to the farther side of the fort. The commandant, a Prussian captain from the Münster district, polite but taciturn, was not a promising boon companion; and still less the infantry officers, stationed here with a relief battalion, or the wireless men, or the telephonists. The artillery lieutenant in command of the armoured towers proved rather more accessible. But when Niggl appeared, his habit of hurriedly ducking his head like an alarmed tortoise seeking shelter heartily disgusted that officer. The sapper officer, under whose command the third company were working, he had not yet met. The sergeant-majors had got into touch, and the lieutenant had inspected the men at work. But Captain Niggl felt justified in waiting for the lieutenant to pay the first call.

And so it came about. One morning between ten and eleven, while the captain was writing a very highly coloured letter to his wife, there was a knock at his door, and the sapper lieutenant stepped in. Captain Niggl's room was exactly like the lieutenant's, except that it faced to the north-west; the entire length of the fort lay between them, a good three hundred yards. The lieutenant, who almost had to stoop as he entered, stood, tall and gaunt, in the light from the window on Captain Niggl's left (so that his hand should not throw a shadow on the paper as he wrote). Captain Niggl got up genially to greet his visitor, but the latter's first words took his breath away. "May I introduce myself?" said the sapper lieutenant, "my name is Kroysing, Eberhard Kroysing, and I am sure we shall get on very well together." He said this in an innocently formal manner, but his eyes were fixed on Captain



Niggl's face. The official career is a training in self-control, Niggl politely offered his visitor a chair. But the ominous shadows of certain past events loomed before his inner vision.

"Kroysing?" he repeated in a questioning tone.

The tall lieutenant bowed. "Kroysing. You seem to know the name?"

"We had a sergeant in the third company . . ."

"That was my brother," remarked the lieutenant.

Ah, sighed Captain Niggl sympathetically. Death always snatched away the best. Sergeant Kroysing had been a model of conscientiousness, and he would have been an ornament to the corps of officers. Only another couple of months and he would have been out of the worst of it; he would have gone home on leave before taking an officers' course, and all would have been well. Franz must needs get him just before the time. The lieutenant bowed in recognition of these sentiments; yes, war was no respecter of persons, and his parents would gradually get over their loss. His brother had said something about a court martial on the last occasion they had met. About the end of April or the beginning of May, if he remembered rightly, soon after the great explosion, and during the heavy fighting over by Thiaumont-Fleury, and he had not really got to the rights of it in the twenty minutes' talk he had had with his brother. What had it all been about? Herr Niggl began by asking how it happened that Lieutenant Kroysing was serving with a Prussian unit, the Kroysings being an old Bavarian family—or Franconian, rather, from Nürnberg? The lieutenant explained; he had been drafted into the sappers from the Mark immediately after the end of term at the Technical High School at Charlottenburg, and had there remained as lieutenant. An excellent example of the unity of the German Reich, which their grandfathers had talked about, and for which their fathers had fought. But to return to that court martial; what were the facts of the case? Oh

nothing, or next to nothing. The censor had rather got the wind up, and Sergeant Kroysing, poor lad, had unfortunately used a few incautious expressions in a letter to a high military official. Captain Niggl really could not recall any more details at the moment. He had been damnably annoyed to let such a good fellow in for trouble. But it was nothing to do with him, and young Kroysing would no doubt have been completely cleared. Alas, everyone thought too little of the risks that A.S.C. men always had to run. Had the Herr Lieutenant heard that only yesterday two of his own men had been blown to bits, just like Christoph? The lieutenant made a mental note of the fact that Niggl had said Christoph; he did not move a muscle of his face. He, too, was sure that the court martial would have cleared his brother. But where were the papers? Who would be the proper person to approach? As to this, Captain Niggl could not say; they had gone the way that all such papers went, the way of all flesh. Perhaps Sergeant-Major Feicht of the third company might be able to give some information. Sergeant-Major Feicht, repeated the lieutenant, making a note of the name. And what had been done with his brother's effects? There would be various small valuables, some of them belonging to their great-grandfather, a privy councillor at the Court of Bavaria, which the lad's mother would be only too glad to have. And papers, too—notes and possibly poems. His brother had been fond of writing. His mother would probably want to bring out a little memorial volume for the benefit of relations and friends—in a word, what had become of all this? With an air of deep surprise Captain Niggl observed that all this must have been put aside at the hospital, and duly forwarded to the dead man's home. No, that was not the case. The hospital authorities had informed him on the day of the funeral that the effects had been forthwith claimed by the company with a view to their being sent home. There, said the captain, that



just showed how carefully the men of the third company were mothered by their orderly room. The parcel must have been dispatched to Nürnberg at once. H'm, said Lieutenant Kroysing; then nothing remained for him but to express his thanks. With the Herr Captain's permission he would inquire in the meantime whether the effects had arrived, and let the Herr Captain know. But he would not trouble him any more at the moment. He regretted to have bothered him, while he was writing a letter, on a purely private affair. There was just one other thing, a service matter; and Lieutenant Kroysing got up. He suggested that Captain Niggel might, by way of encouraging his men, accompany the early morning blasting parties now and again, or the entrenching parties at night. It would certainly make a good impression, and would be useful to the Herr Captain in his present post. There was danger within and without. So saying, he bowed and took his leave of his senior and superior with the prescribed salutations; heels together and finger to his cap. He did not shake hands.

Captain Niggel, of the Inland Revenue office at Weilheim, sat in his chair and wiped the sweat from his brow. He had suddenly become aware that this underground chamber was a trap, which might indeed prove to be his grave. Why had not Sergeant Kroysing carried a warning in his face, like his brother. Sergeant Kroysing looked like a fool and behaved like one, but these were eyes and hands that it would be better to avoid. It was certainly not chance that had shifted him and his third company to Douaumont. This man knew something; how much remained to be seen. And now he meant to send him, Niggel, out into that domain of devastation, where a man might be blown to bits in the twinkling of an eye. No, this account must be cancelled. He must write to Captain Lauber at once, or, better still, telephone here and now. Captain Lauber had been deceived; this was private vengeance in official disguise. He and his

Landstürmers were quite out of place here, as Lauber must realize. Or perhaps he had better first get into touch with Simmerding and Feicht. What had happened to Kroysing's effects? Were they still reposing in the orderly-room cupboard because no one had found time to look through the lad's papers? Had the foxes divided the spoils? Well, there was no hurry. Before Kroysing had got an answer from home, he would have devised a plan. The most urgent matter was to discover the enemy's intentions and make sure how much he knew.

But the most urgent matter of all was to keep his head. His sudden loss of nerve was the fault of this damned dungheap, Douaumont. In the monastery cellar at Ettal or down in Starnberg castle he would not have thrown in his hand at once, merely because a man he had to deal with in the way of duty was the brother of another man with whom he had also dealt in the way of duty. It was he alone who had envisaged the other in the guise of avenger—he alone, under the weight of the fact that this blasted heap of brickwork was not called Ettal or Starnberg castle but Douaumont—he alone had engendered his own fears. The inquiry about the papers was as natural as the one about the dead man's effects. The fact that Lieutenant Kroysing was in charge of the sapper depot here carried no more implications than the fact that his sergeant brother had served with the A.S.C. Moreover, the Herr Lieutenant had shown little interest in his brother; was he likely to have sought out his brother's company and company commander as objects for his vengeance. Utter nonsense! Young Kroysing was dead and could say nothing. A.S.C. companies had always been stationed at Douaumont. If this was not chance, then chance did not exist; and the parsons who conceived of a jealous God, sitting up above and watching evil-doers and protecting the innocent, were right. Still, it was no hard matter to get round the Almighty. You went to confession, did your penance, and you might

snap your fingers at the Devil and his emissary, this great lanky blackguard of a Prussian who wasn't even a proper Prussian, but a Nürnberg imitation. "Niggl," said he to himself, "you're a fool! Get on with your letter home, and don't let your wife and children notice you've got anything on your mind."

Captain Niggl got through the day tolerably well. The midday bombardment unsettled him a good deal; he resolved to go out that night and got hold of some maps and studied them, feeling more and more relieved to observe the distance between the French and himself. About five in the afternoon his second in command, Lieutenant Simmerding, burst into the room displaying every sign of terror. Having closed the door behind him—did the captain know, he stuttered out, the name of the officer commanding the sapper depot in the fort? Of course he did, said Niggl bumptiously; he had known it for a long time—a very decent fellow and an excellent colleague, Lieutenant Kroysing. But why on earth hadn't he mentioned it to Feicht and himself, panted Simmerding. There was trouble on the way. And he handed Niggl a white and blue official telegram, as transcribed by the telephonists when they take a message over the wire. "Christoph's effects not received—Kroysing." Niggl eyed the paper for a while. Where had he got it from, he asked in a toneless voice. The little Jew, Süssmann, had brought it across to him, for his information, and with a request that it should be returned. Niggl nodded several times in silence. His efforts at self-deception had been vain. Men who smiled politely and launched such explosive telegrams were not to be ignored. "You were quite right, my lad," he said genially, "and I have been a fool. Herr Kroysing is a dangerous man, and we must think what's best to be done. To begin with we'll shift it all off on to the field post." But the hand that relit his cigar was quivering, and when Simmerding growled: "That'll be a fat lot of good!" he did not know what to reply.



Three days later, Captain Niggl ran with head bent along the echoing corridors. In that short time the company had had to record two more killed and thirty-one wounded. Twice had French shells burst among the column. And though the word stood for scattered groups of working parties rather than a line of marching men, the impression left upon the A.S.C. men and their officers was that they were being wilfully sacrificed to the various forms of death that lay in wait for them outside the stone walls of Douaumont. And Captain Niggl was now running along, with his hands clapped to his ears. For from a side corridor, where the large dressing-station had been installed, came piercing shrieks; just such shrieks as he had heard when two men had been killed and nine wounded about fifty yards ahead of him. The kindly morning mists had suddenly parted, and the rest can be imagined. Herr Niggl was no runner; his belly quivered, and his sleeves slipped ludicrously up his arms. But he ran. Under the harsh glare of the electric light he fled from the ceaseless lamentations of tormented flesh.

## CHAPTER IV: DRESS REHEARSAL

WHEN Eberhard Kroysing thought of Captain Niggel, his heart sang: the air—that grey and murderous air within the fort walls—seemed secretly to sparkle. He was taking his time. There was a great deal to do in those days, for suddenly, over-night, the rain had begun, and many regarded it as the beginning of the autumn downpours. A fine penetrating drizzle descended from leaden clouds; by the morning the countryside was glistening with countless pools and puddles; the war, in astonishment, had relapsed into silence.

“Süssmann,” said Kroysing, puffing at a pipe and sprawling lazily on to his bed, “we’ll finish my painting this morning.” The plan of an emplacement for six new mine-throwers lay unfinished on the table, drawn in coloured chalk. “But in the afternoon we’ll inspect the damage. If this doesn’t stop, we’re badly out in our reckoning and our preparations are too late.” Süssmann said he was sure it would stop. “It’s just a spot of rain, as we say in Berlin. But it’s a useful reminder to hurry up and get hold of the first and second companies.” “Right,” said Kroysing gaily, “and that deserves a schnapps, not to say a cognac. Fetch out the bottle, Süssmann; we’ll accept it as a proxy.” Süssmann grinned, took a long-necked bottle, still half full, out of the lieutenant’s little cupboard, together with two squat tumblers such as are to be found in any estaminet, filled them, and put them on the iron stool by the head of Kroysing’s bed. The lieutenant motioned him to help himself, sniffed deeply at the golden-yellow fragrance, then sipped with ecstasy the liquor that had brought such age-long solace

to the human race. "Listen, my lad," he said, addressing himself to the ceiling. "About twelve o'clock, when the Herr Captain has had his sleep out, you trot along to his orderly room, and ask him nicely where the other two companies are stationed; and then ask if he will be so kind as to let you have a look at the post-book. The third company must have made a note of the date when they entrusted my brother's possessions to the wild waves of the field post. For, my dear Süssmann, that parcel has gone astray. A certain percentage of parcels and letters must do so, if only to satisfy the theory of probability. And the fact that Christoph's stuff is among them—is just luck, of course. We Kroysings were always unlucky." Süssmann would have preferred to go at once, but Kroysing did not want to be left alone. "If our friend Bertin is an old hand in the front line, he'll stroll across this morning and show us his rather crooked nose," yawned Kroysing. "Do you think he'll venture so far?" Süssmann said he was sure that it was only shyness that might prevent Bertin from coming. He had telephoned across that morning to assure him that all was well, but the bird had already flown. He had been on night duty and so had a free day; according to Strumpf the Lands-turner he had gone over to see a school friend whom he had discovered among the light howitzers; then he was coming on to Douaumont. "It would have been a miracle if he hadn't found someone he knew among all that crowd of Upper Silesians."

"Why do you laugh at the fellow?" asked Kroysing.

"Apart from the fact that I find most things funny hereabouts, I've never seen a chap so full of nerves as Bertin."

Kroysing looked up. "Do you think he's a coward? I should be sorry if that were so."

Süssmann shook his long skull. "Not at all," he answered. "Did I say so? I said he was full of nerves. It's really his own naivety, a sort of lunatic curiosity, that



gets him on the move. His only fear is of his superiors. He's not afraid of shells, but he shits his pants at the sight of an orderly room or a shoulder-strap. Poor devil," he added meditatively. Kroysing rolled over on to his stomach, leaning on his elbows. "You don't understand anything about it. That's quite as it should be. The rank and file men, according to the gospel of the great Frederick, must fear their superiors a great deal more than they fear the enemy; otherwise they would never attack. Anyhow, I fancy this panic of Bertin's would disappear with a sound military education. What are such men doing in the A.S.C.? I wish you would keep an eye on him, Süssmann. If he's fit for something better, I'll gladly do what I can to help him. He's intelligent, well trained, he's been out here long enough, and he's a very good fellow. All depends on whether he's got the right sort of go about him—you know what I mean. If he has, we'll manage to get him a stripe and a commission later on—as we're going to do for you."

Süssmann, who was scribbling on a field postcard with a red pencil, tapped on the table. "He would have to apply to be shifted from his unit."

"He would."

"He'll never do it," said Süssmann emphatically. "That's one of his obsessions. We talked about it on the way back last time. He's a burnt child; he had volunteered for the West, when he was put into a transport column for the East; that piece of idiocy got him slung into Jansch's battalion, and the iron has entered into his soul. Never to volunteer for anything, that's his principle of life now. And not a bad one, as the Herr Lieutenant will admit."

Kroysing shook his fist. "You impertinent rascal! 'Volunteers forward!' is in the best Prussian tradition, and a matter of honour for a sapper. Didn't you learn about Sapper Klinke and the Düppel trenches when you

were at school? 'My name's Klinke, and I open the gate,' says your countryman Fontane, and you ought to know it."

"Oh, poets are capable of anything."

"Don't abuse poets," said Kroysing warningly; "here comes ours."

Sure enough, there was a shy knock at the door, and Bertin entered, wet and with very dirty boots. He was commended for his timely arrival; Kroysing, while suggesting a glass of brandy to keep out the cold, decided to get up out of consideration for his guest, gave him a fill of Dutch pipe tobacco, and wandered about the room in his black-sleeved waistcoat of padded silk; then he washed his face and, as he dried it, related his little encounter with Captain Niggl. Bertin polished his spectacles, which were dim with damp from the rain; in the smoke from his pipe his short-sighted eyes could barely discern Kroysing's face and the flapping towel. He had not been able to sleep, he said, after the opening of the letter; that last message and the voice of the—he swallowed—dead man, which he recalled with such strange clarity, had become so firmly fixed in his mind. What sort of creature was this man Niggl, who could put down a fine young fellow like Christoph? Kroysing, putting on his tunic, slipped between his visitors and the furniture to his place behind the table. "Quite an ordinary man," he said in his deep voice, "one among nine millions, just a common villain."

"And what are you going to do to him?"

"I'll tell you," replied Kroysing. "First, I'm going to squeeze him, and in this proceeding I shall be assisted by the surrounding landscape, the agreeable molehill in which we live, and Franz. Next: he will sign a scrap of paper, a confession that he kept my brother in Cham-brettes farm until he was killed—with the purpose of blocking the court martial inquiry."

"He'll never sign that," said Süssmann.



"Oh, yes, he will," retorted Kroysing, looking up. "I myself am curious to see how this will be managed, but it will be managed. I feel like a boy again, full of violence and vengeance. Those were the days for hating and hunting down a victim. It may be that the war has laid bare the primeval hunter that lives in all of us and drinks his evening tea from his enemy's skull. Well, after two years of it, there's nothing to be surprised at."

"Do you think that's right?" asked Bertin, rather aghast.

"I call everything right that prolongs my life and destroys my enemy," said Kroysing shortly, carefully selecting a green pencil to sketch in the position of the new mine-throwers—he had used blue for the German line, red for the French line, and brown for the contours of the country—and continued: "This isn't a girls' school. The lies about the spirit of the front and the comradeship of war may be all right, and they may be necessary to keep the show going for the benefit of the chaps behind, and the chaps across the way. Sublime self-sacrifice, you know, excellent pabulum for war correspondents, members of the Reichstag, and the reading public. But as a matter of fact we all grab what we can reach. It's a war of all against all—that's the proper formula."

"Yes, I've felt that," said little Sergeant Süssmann dryly.

"Quite," said Kroysing, and blinked at him. "And so has every man of us, though not so drastically as you have. And anyone that hasn't felt it doesn't know anything about the war."

"Are you really of the opinion," said Bertin with secret superiority and a faint smile, "that ambition and the desire to distinguish oneself . . .?"

"Bosh," said Kroysing, "I said what we can reach, and I mean it; what that may be, differs with each and all of us. One collects decorations, another wants to make a career, and gloats over every step he gets. The

great majority are out for cash and are content to loot French houses, or share out the possessions of the dead. Our friend Niggel wanted a quiet life."

"And what does the Herr Lieutenant really want?" asked Süssmann with a droll and apelike grin.

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know, my lad," laughed Kroysing. "You may take it that I want to make myself feared." And he added in a graver tone: "No one has ever spat in my soup as this man has done."

After a brief silence, Bertin said diffidently: "Then I'm abnormal. I simply want to do my job as well as possible; and I want an early and honourable peace, so that I can get back again to my wife and my work."

"Wife," said Kroysing cynically, "work . . . an honourable peace. Well, you've got a surprise coming to you—besides, I don't believe you. Hullo, what's that?"

All three sat up and listened. A fearful, rending shriek swept down upon them from the clouds, followed by a terrific crash, and then a thunderous roar that rumbled through the passages; not so near as they had feared. "Let's go and look," shouted Süssmann. "Stay where you are," snapped Kroysing. He picked up the telephone receiver. "Ring me up at once as soon as you get any news." Fear still quivered in the telephonist's vocal chords. Kroysing eyed his guest narrowly and with satisfaction. Bertin was surprised at himself; again he was aware of a sense of sudden exaltation, as on his first expedition through the ravaged land with Böhne and the corporal. Süssmann, his hands still quivering, said it could only be a thirty-eight or a forty-two long-range, a German gun firing short. The telephone buzzed; heaviest calibre, direct hit on the western entrenchments, reported the exchange. Extensive damage to the outer walls. "Thanks," said Kroysing. It could not possibly be a forty-two. Three thousand yards too short—even those blasted gunners in the rear couldn't make a mistake like that. "Look

out," said he; "number two." All three ducked; Süssmann slipped under the table; no one breathed. The cloven air shrieked behind the hurtling steel . . . nearer . . . a red and yellow flash outside the window, a thunderous crash; flakes of paint and plaster dropped on to the table, the electric lamp went out, the chairs on which the men sat quivered. "That's a hit," said Kroysing calmly; the crash had been sharper and more shattering, and followed by a deeper roar. "All serene," said Süssmann, calmly emerging from beneath the table, the only person who had dealt adequately with the situation. Kroysing retorted that, unless he was very much mistaken, the armoured turret at the north-west corner of the fort had been hit. He asked to be put through to it. The two others eagerly watched the smile of satisfaction on his face. "Stout fellows, these Frenchmen. They can shoot, and they can build a fort. The turret was hit, but it's still standing; a new calibre, says the sergeant, heavier than the thirty-eights of Fort Marre and the mortars. A new type, probably intended for the Somme." "And it's being tried out on us," said Süssmann, while Kroysing tried to get through to the turret again. This time the exchange reported that it had been temporarily evacuated owing to the gases left behind by the explosion. It was slightly damaged too; it would not revolve. "Well, if that's all . . ." said Kroysing, hanging up the receiver. Then he sent Süssmann and Bertin with emergency electric torches to the A.S.C. men, to see how they were getting on.

The pair had no need to go far. The tunnel outside the Bavarians' casemate was loud with their curses and lamentations as they crouched in terror on the floor or struggled to get out. Their N.C.O.'s, brandishing pocket-torches, were just able to prevent them from dashing out into the yard. At the angle of the passage, in a faint glimmer of daylight, stood Captain Niggel, biting his underlip, bare-headed, in an unbuttoned *litevka* and slippers.



Simmerding elbowed his way up to him, while Sergeant Feicht's hoarse voice could be heard trying to reassure the men at the back. The men were quite mad, panted Simmerding; they said they were unarmed Landsturm, and not fighting units and would not be shut up in such a place. "Not so mad at all," said Niggl in an undertone, with staring eyes that flashed with fury when Süssmann appeared with his black miner's lamp. Unfortunately the sapper's punctiliously correct demeanour gave him no opening. Niggl told him to inform the lieutenant that his men's sleep had been interrupted, and a few of them had been flung out of bed. There had been a good many bruises and a sprained wrist, and they were all rather badly shaken. The blasted thing must have come down just outside the casemate. Süssmann tried to reassure everybody, addressing himself mainly to the men; the shots had been aimed at B tower, which had indeed been hit, but the fact that the concrete had survived such an onslaught was the best proof of the solidity of the masonry. For the gun had been of a new type, also a forty-two—he did not know how nearly this improvisation approached the truth—he urged the men not to lose their heads, but to go back quietly to their casemates and get some sleep. An extra ration of rum would be issued with the evening tea.

Athirst for comfort, the men pressed forward into the light and listened eagerly; they knew the little man, who, it was rumoured, had been killed and come to life again. Moreover, the fact that the lieutenant's name was Kroysing had also got about; many of those sluggish brains transferred to Sergeant Süssmann something of the confidence they had felt in Sergeant Kroysing who had also been a short man with brown hair. So his speech had its effect. These patient creatures were easily cheered by a little help and encouragement. Süssmann, ringed by his three enemies, threw a fleeting glance at their faces. He sensed the weakness behind those masks; should he ask for the post-book now? They would have refused



## CHAPTER V: AMONG NEIGHBOURS

LATE in the afternoon Captain Niggl sent for Sergeant-Major Feicht. It was dark in his little room; the electricians were still toiling at the wires; in the dim light of the stearine cartridge on the table, the Herr Captain threw a formless shadow on to the wall. He was sitting on his bedstead, where he had been asleep, and that evening he proposed to accompany his entrenching party for a short distance; he had his breeches on and a pair of grey woollen stockings which his wife had knitted for him, but there were slippers on his feet. Weilheim slippers, black, and adorned with a design of edelweiss in raised embroidery. The sergeant-major stood stiffly at the door. The captain, in a weary voice, told him to come in, shut the door, and sit down on the stool. Sergeant-Major Feicht obeyed, with a sympathetic glance at his superior. He too felt wretched. Feicht and Niggl came from the same neighbourhood; before the war, Ludwig Feicht, a native of Tutzing and married to a Tutzing woman, had been a purser on one of the smart little steamers that plied on the Würm or Starnberg lakes, and when the northern visitors crowded the decks and admired the wooded banks, the clear water, and the silvery gulls circling above their heads, the portly purser in his blue, gold-laced reefer jacket and imposing peaked cap stepped up and told them in broad but intelligible Bavarian that this was the rising summer resort of Tutzing, and that was Bernried with its little church, far older than the finest churches in Berlin. He thrilled with self-complacency when the innocent Berliners or Saxons addressed him as "Herr Captain," and asked the most fatuous questions; whether the Rose



island over by Tutzing was artificial, and whether King Ludwig had had a castle on it. Ludwig Feicht loved those summer days on his native lakes; his broad red face radiated goodwill. He had two little children in Tutzing, and his wife Theresa, while he was away, managed single-handed a small grocery and sweet shop for the benefit of the summer visitors, with which the place was still packed. Even now—indeed more than ever now—Tutzing was very populous; the starving Prussians descended upon it, eager to fill their bellies with Bavarian milk and dumplings and ham and to leave the new brown or blue twenty-mark notes in exchange. Ludwig Feicht had hitherto been a contented man. Even the transfer to Douaumont he had borne with equanimity, as a man whom fate would never betray. But since that day, since those two shell explosions, his state of mind had suffered an abrupt upheaval. The fact that Franz had fired those shells at Douaumont, and knew his job so damned well that he needed only to fire those two—this, combined with what the gunners from B turret had told him, had left him aghast. His simple aim had been to get home safe and sound, with a bit of money saved; it now began to look precarious.

“Feicht,” said the captain, in a voice that was now always hoarse, and in the dialect of their Bavarian lake-land, “just answer me this—not as speaking to your officer, but as one man to another when they’re both in a tight corner, as a man from Tutzing to a man from Weilheim, who has got across a man from Nürnberg—suppose the two of us were sitting in the shooting-hut above the Benediktenwand, and in the morning a blasted Nürnberger came along, a Franconian, and wanted something out of us . . .”

Feicht sat humped on his stool, with his elbows on his knees. Now he knew. That was what had flung him into this inferno. He had always laughed at parsons and the church, and had cheerfully pilfered from the steamship

company. Money he loved second-best of all things in the world. But he ought to have kept his fingers off the possessions of the dead. Trouble was afoot. "Captain," he said hoarsely, "I know what's up, sir."

Niggl nodded; it was only natural that a sensible man like his friend Feicht should understand the ways of the world. Who would have thought that a silly fool like Sergeant Kroysing could own such a formidable brother. He was a man with a grip and a purpose, and his purpose was destruction.

Yes, exclaimed Feicht, shaking his clenched fist, which so correct a sergeant-major would never have dreamt of doing in other moods and circumstances. They envisaged Lieutenant Kroysing as a sort of crab that could easily nip off a pencil thrust between its claws in sport. There were only two alternatives: to let the pencil go, or to plunge the crab into boiling water. "That's how it is, Feicht, you see. We can't put the crab into boiling water, but the lanky bastard may fall into it himself when he's hopping about the front line with his mine-throwers. And perhaps we might do our bit to help—flash a torch on him when we're all up in front, and we're under cover and he's on the top. But as long as that can't be done, we'll have to let him hold on to the pencil. Have you got the list?"

Feicht said he had.

"Do you know where the stuff is?"

Feicht, without changing colour, reflected for a moment; yes, he knew where the stuff was.

"I've got all his papers put away in my drawer. I'll look them out and stack them up here on my bed. While we're away, you make up a neat parcel, of everything—everything, mind!—reckon up his pay to the day he was killed, not a penny short. Can we produce the company commander's receipt acknowledging the effects?"

Feicht nodded.

"The parcel must be on Lieutenant Kroysing's table by



tonight. If he wants to ask any questions, I'll answer them. We mustn't give him any opening. Feicht," he went on, meditatively eyeing his bulky subordinate, "just for the time we're playing the weaker hand; just for the time. And now good-bye, neighbour. Tell Dimpflinger to send me in a decent bit of meat, even if it's out of a tin. I'll play this hand through to the end. We'll see who laughs last." Feicht looked with deep sympathy at his officer, as he sat huddled on the edge of his bed in his slippers and blue-striped waistcoat with the stag's horn buttons. Here was a stout Bavarian who would protect his men from this bloody scarecrow of a Nürnberger. "That'll be all right, sir," he said heartily, "don't you worry. We know when we've got an officer we can trust. And when we're all sitting comfortably at home, Feicht will know whom he has to thank for it."

"Get along now, Feicht."

The sergeant-major walked to the door, unlocked it, clicked his heels, and saluted. They had understood each other; no more words were needed.

When there were some spoils to be shared out, the sergeant-major kept the lion's share, bestowing a modest item or two on the clerk in charge of the case, the postal orderly, and one or another of the N.C.O.'s whom he happened to favour. It was very tiresome to have to restore gifts already received, but no wise man questions the decision of a higher power; any losses would soon be made good.

Alone in the small square room that had been assigned to Simmerding and himself as a billet and office, Ludwig Emmeran Feicht was busy over the various belongings left behind at the end of July by Sergeant Kroysing, now almost forgotten. The company roster lay on the table, the electric light was burning cheerfully once more, the door was locked, a tumblerful of red wine and a filled pipe helped to solace an irksome task. A coup had failed—

never mind, better luck next time. The portly man pottered round the room, setting everything in order, then sat astride a chair and surveyed the result. And as he came upon each object, he ticked it off on the list with a freshly sharpened pencil.

First, a leather waistcoat, worn but serviceable; it and (secondly) the gold-mounted fountain pen had fallen to the share of Dillinger the clerk, and he had looked rather rueful when he had to disgorge them; but he understood. It was odd how the entire company had understood that there was something still afoot in the matter of Sergeant Kroysing when that lanky brother of his turned up. At first they went about with rather a malicious air; but that had long since faded from their faces. They visited their comrades in hospital and bethought them bitterly that for this they had to thank Sergeant Kroysing. It may be that the reflective capacity of one or two Munich working men went further and suggested that the orderly room was responsible for the disaster. But this line of thought lacked the compelling force of the French shells; a man dies and is dead; that was that. So Franz helped to maintain discipline, and one military machine backed up the other.

Pipe, tobacco pouch, and clasp-knife—Sergeant Pangerl had honourably brought them back. The pipe, of the best Nürnberg workmanship, little Kroysing had hardly used, and always carried about in a little leather bag. Alas, it would now lie gathering dust in a drawer. Sergeant Feicht looked longingly at the broad vulcanite mouth-piece, the shining brierwood bowl, the little aluminium inner tube, put the parts together again, slipped the pipe into its bag, and entered a little tick on the list. A pocket-book stuffed with papers, a notebook, a little leather booklet with a calendar for 1915, and a small exercise book full of poems! The kind of verses that rhymed at the ends. Just like the fellow. People who played about with verse had much better keep their fingers out of other people's business.

Ludwig Feicht pursed his lips contemptuously. If they got into trouble, they had only themselves to thank. Then the most important items: purse, watch, and ring. It was a pity about the ring; he would have given it to his wife Theresa as a little surprise when he came home on leave; it was set with a fine green stone, an emerald, and the little ring itself was very neatly modelled in the form of a snake biting its own tail. He would have liked to wear the watch himself, either on his wrist or on a long thin chain across the front of his waistcoat. Well, he would never wear it now. He hadn't done so badly in this unit, but the spoils were trifling compared with what had been picked up by the infantry and the cavalry who had marched into the rich lands of Belgium and Luxemburg and northern France at the beginning of the war. They had collected some loot and no mistake: the clocks of Liège, the jewels of Namur; and there was plenty to be had in the small provincial towns. They hadn't let the Bavarians get a look in there, of course—those blasted Northerners! It was the Rhinelanders and the Saxons who had filled their pockets in those days. Surely it was ancient and respectable tradition that the soldier should lay hands on what he could when risking his life for his Fatherland? Did their masters do otherwise when they swallowed up whole provinces—Belgium, Poland, Serbia, and that lovely bit of country called the ore-deposit of Longwy-Briey? If a man did not make his fortune out of war, he never did; and what a waste it would have been to let the lovely watches and chains and bracelets and necklaces be melted down when the little towns were burned out because they were full of *francs-tireurs*, blast them. Where had he met that fellow who had a travelling library with a false bottom and a secret drawer—packed with Belgian watches? Wasn't it in Alsace? Yes, *he* knew his way about. However, the war was not over yet; much might happen still; all France might lie open to the spoiler when they had won the victory. And win it they must and would—or all was



up; many others beside Feicht knew that. So he would cheerfully restore this Swiss watch with the handsomely engraved case to the fortunate heirs. It had kept good time, to that he could testify. Money; he counted out the folded banknotes, seventy-six marks, eighty pfennigs—ah well! It would have bought the children new dresses, nice little pleated taffeta frocks with green silk pinafores. No matter; Theresa was making good money out of the starving Prussians. He had put the money carefully aside, and rightly, as it turned out. The last item—underclothes; Ludwig Feicht dipped a pen in the ink and made a note in the margin, between a couple of small asterisks, and above the quartermaster's guardian signature: "Given away to needy comrades in accordance with the wishes of the deceased." Full stop.

Neatly wrapped in the leather waistcoat the little pile of belongings lay on the grey painted table. The worthy man then produced from his box a large piece of orange-coloured oil-paper, stiffened by inwoven threads, and made up a parcel, in such a way that an addressed adhesive label lay exactly in the centre, tied it with string, produced some sealing wax and the company stamp, and sealed the effects of the late Sergeant Kroysing with two large red impressions of that stamp. The address he left intact. It was directed to the orderly room of the third company, and the sender was indicated as—Field Post Depot, Fifth Echelon. In that same paper, after the battalion had been a week on its weary way from Poland to Verdun, a whole pile of belated postal packages had been forwarded; and it now served this purpose admirably. Ludwig Feicht inscribed the following words on a small yellow label: "Return to sender; address insufficient, and no duplicate enclosed," in a narrow pointed handwriting; then he inspected the postmark; it was most suitably illegible. He could now draft a brief but comprehensive little letter for the captain, to be sent with the parcel—to the effect that it had been correctly addressed to Councillor Kroysing, but by a mistake on the part of

Dillinger, the orderly-room clerk, it had been sent to the field-post address of the company instead of to Nürnberg—Ebensee, Schilfstrasse, 28. Dillinger had been severely reprimanded; indeed, he would normally have been put under arrest for three days, but had been let off lightly as his wife had just had a baby, and this had made him inattentive to duty. If the company had not been suddenly “shifted,” the package would long since have found its way to Nürnberg. And that was that. Had the lieutenant any observations to offer? Ludwig Feicht, the steamboat clerk, grinned complacently, dipped a small brush in a bottle of gum, stuck the “Return” label in the right-hand corner of the address, rubbed it gently with the sole of his slipper, so as to simulate dirt acquired in the post, pressed the company stamp on it in such a way that only two curved lines and an asterisk were visible, for oil-paper is not very receptive of impressions, and he had been careful not to press the stamp down on to the pad; then with his hands behind his back he surveyed his handiwork. Excellent; the Herr Captain would be pleased.

As the men marched out that night, when darkness had almost fallen, Messrs. Simmerding and Niggl met at the head of the column. Although Captain Niggl had half a bottle of bordeaux under his own belt, he was disgusted by the reek of alcohol diffused by his second in command. There was no objection to a man drinking to keep up his courage; he did it himself, and so did everyone in the army. What he did deprecate was excess. The two men barely exchanged a word as they tramped on side by side. But at last the other’s hunched shoulders stirred a spark of sympathy in Niggl. They too were near neighbours—the Simmerdings lived on the northern shores of the lake—so he began by asking in an undertone how Simmerding felt after the shock of that morning.—All right, grunted Simmerding.—Good, says Niggl; and, he added, there was reason to feel cheerful, as Sergeant-Major Feicht had

disposed of that unpleasant affair regarding little Kroysing's effects.—Aha! says Simmerding, with a wild and bleary look at his companion on the right; disposed of it, eh? So Feicht had brought little Kroysing to life again, had he, eh? Ha! Ha! Got him out of his coffin, blown some breath into him, and put him back with his platoon, eh? Nothing less than that would satisfy the gentleman in question.

“Simmerding,” said Niggl quietly, ignoring the other's excited tone, “pull yourself together. The game isn't up yet.”

At this Simmerding stopped and brandished his clenched fists from the flapping sleeves of his cloak. “Oh, isn't it, eh? It's a damn bad business, I tell you, and you know it as well as I do. I'm fed up”—he raised his hand to his mouth—“fed up to the teeth with it. I wish I'd never let myself in for sending the chap to Chambrettes farm and then monkeying with the papers—it was you that fixed that——”

“You acted with your eyes open, Simmerding,” observed Niggl coolly. “Mind you don't fall too far behind your company. And say a few Ave Marias during the night.” Poor fish, he thought contemptuously.

Passed down from the front files came the oft-repeated and monotonous warning: “Look out—wire above; look out—wire below.”



## CHAPTER VI: DRIVEN GAME

WHEN Lieutenant Kroysing came home that night and switched on the light, his whistling abruptly stopped. He was always glad to get back to the hospitable vaults of Douaumont—hospitable vaults, indeed. He laughed to himself at such an expression; what a dark, distorted world lay behind such irony. The interminable, tortuous path up from the infantry position, the shameless agility, born of a hundredfold experience, that was needed to evade the French shells—all this gave him positive pleasure as soon as his footsteps began to echo against the stone walls. Which was why Lieutenant Kroysing was whistling. But he broke off in the finest passage of the *Meistersinger* overture. Open-mouthed he eyed the astonishing parcel on his table, with a folded note slipped between the oil-paper and the string. "What can that be?" he asked himself half-quizzically as he slung his steel helmet from a clothes peg, threw his belt, dagger, revolver, and torch on to the bed, and sat down beside them, to pull off his leggings and mud-caked boots. Ordinarily he would have rung for his batman, who had only one virtue: he could cook chops and make coffee like no one else. But Kroysing wanted to be alone with that parcel.

As he bent down to unlace his boots, he kept his eyes on it as though it might disappear as suddenly and magically as it had come within his ken. Yes, he thought, this might be called a victory—victory number two, won by a bold advance, increasing pressure, persistent exploitation of the enemy's every weakness, and an exact knowledge of the terrain. Our tactical instructions, applied to Lieutenant Kroysing's private war with Captain Niggel, were bearing fruit.

"It's odd," he thought as he walked up to the table, "that I never for a moment took it for an ordinary parcel from home. I've pretty well got my teeth into Herr Niggl." Then he read the covering note, written in a copybook hand and signed: "Feicht, Sergeant-Major," eyed the wrapping-paper suspiciously, and nodded. There was nothing on it to show that the parcel had really been returned by the field post depot; the curves and asterisks would hardly delude a schoolboy. On the other hand there was nothing to prove that it had not. The conspiracy against the lad had been the work of astute and experienced soldiers, not easily disconcerted; they had parried his stroke admirably and, as the custom was, sacrificed Dillinger, the clerk. If he fell into the trap and demanded Dillinger's blood, the man would certainly be arrested but, as a reward for his silence, would find himself next on the leave roster. A wolf like Kroysing was not thus to be beguiled. His set grey eyes glared through the wall at his ultimate prey, the captain.

He drew his knife, slit the string, and opened the parcel. There, wrapped in the soft brown leather waistcoat that he knew so well, lay all of Christoph that was left above the earth, which his enemies had doubtless shared among themselves as their due spoil; watch, fountain-pen, purse, snake-ring, letter-case, notebook, pipe, and tobacco. Breathing heavily, his clenched fists outstretched before him, Eberhard Kroysing, mastering himself with an effort, looked down at the lad's belongings. He had not been a good brother to him—he had bullied him a good deal. Elder brothers do not love the later comers; they are jealous of their parents' love and resent having to parcel out their sphere of influence. But though the elder cannot rid himself of the later-born, he can at least subjugate him; and let him beware if he should disobey. A nursery can become a little hell. Children are infinitely resourceful in the instinctive use of secret instruments of war. And so it has always been, not merely in the Kroysing family. If the parents intervened, so much



the worse for the weaker party. This continued until the bonds of home were gradually loosened, the brothers each absorbed in their own lives, and the elder came to regard the younger merely with cool indifference. Not until later still, when he came home for his holidays, did he realize that his brother was becoming a man and might become a friend. Then came the war, and men gradually reverted to the beast, and though there had always been the hope that they would get leave together by Christmas at the latest, and all four of them keep the feast at home, it had been too late. In the meantime, a few blackguards, to get out of a little trouble, had managed to have the lad killed by the French. He would settle the reckoning with Franz; but here, on all the walls of that gaunt cell, were written the words: "Too late." "Too late" on the ceiling; "Too late" on the window; "Too late" on the floor; and in the air hovered the words "Too late." It was only too natural that the fighting nations should pin their faith to a beyond, a survival and a meeting on the other side. For the simple, forward-moving brain of the fighting man it was inconceivable that a man so suddenly cut off should vanish finally and for ever; his imagination recoiled at the idea. And the foe must be immortal, so that victory might endure. The friend must live on, for what shall a man do without his friend? And the brother must live on so that all his youthful sufferings may be made good.

He picked up the watch, wound and set it. From far away came an intermittent rumbling; it must be from Fort Vaux, where the fighting constantly revived, and the French were busily improving their position. But the ticking of the watch was still audible in that silent room. Its owner's heart could never be made to tick again. Well, he had already offered up to him an oblation of death. And he would hound Niggel down until he confessed the truth. Then Judge-Advocate Merterns would take up the case and deal very faithfully with Captain Niggel. Such was his set purpose. He could of course have spat in

Niggl's face, taken him by the throat, or boxed his ears. But duelling was forbidden in wartime, much as he would have liked to see the great lumbering brute facing a levelled pistol; the way of justice was the only way and, in fact, the most effective. He would ruin Herr Niggl, even if the fellow did survive, and wreck his life. As a social outcast, an ex-convict, he would be dismissed from his post, and he was no more than a petty Bavarian official, he and his family would starve. He might then open a little stationer's shop in Buenos Aires or Constantinople; but in any place within reach of the German corps of officers, he would be a dead man, despised by his wife and hated by his children. "Will that satisfy you, Christoph? You were always a soft-hearted fellow, and never wanted your enemy's scalp, but I want it. We shan't get it tonight, or even tomorrow; but we shall get it. And Bertin shall be a lieutenant in your stead."

He withstood the temptation to look through his brother's papers, wrapped everything up in the leather waistcoat, undressed, lay down, and put out the light.





**BOOK FOUR**  
**ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HUMANITY**



## CHAPTER I: SIGNS AND OMENS

IN the night and just before dawn, when the eyes of the captive balloons are closed, the field kitchens try to manœuvre their way up to the infantry positions. From any cover they can find they deal out the hot food, needed so sorely and so long: thick bean soup with bits of meat in it, blue-grey groats, or yellow peas and bacon, in tin containers that retain the heat, snatched by the fighting men who dash back into the trenches. A perilous operation, for a soldier with hot soup inside him fights better, and it is an instrument of civilized warfare to inflict privations that may break an enemy's morale. For this reason the advanced batteries keep an eye on the field kitchens. They sometimes miss, but not often, and their activities are always disastrous.

In the early morning, about half-past six, when the ground haze, long since transformed into the morning mist of autumn, parts for a few moments, the French in Belleville espied Herr Niggel's toiling troop. They had long known that the Germans were extending their positions to the rear, and the conjectured progress of these supporting points was indicated on their maps. The Germans indeed had for weeks past been planning the thrust that was to win them back Douaumont and Fort Vaux; they were saving ammunition for the purpose, improving the approaches to the front line, and preparing their field batteries for an advance. The organization of the German front was good in many ways, but it was not flexible, and the contact between the artillery and the forward observation officers, both with the infantry and especially in the forts, was more efficient and quicker among the French.



A few minutes after the discovery of the suspected field kitchens, shrapnel began to burst out of the now gathering mist upon the unlucky trench-diggers, who scattered and fled in all directions. There were only eight wounded in all, as the French mistakenly shifted their fire further forward on to the huge ravine south of Douaumont, through which the men would have run in quest of food; but the company did not return to the fort until half-past nine, instead of about eight; and this extra hour and a half nearly shattered Niggl's nerve. He had felt so cheerful, and so pleased with Feicht, who had indeed disposed of the affair in admirable fashion; the idea about the field-post depot, and the covering letter, and so on, had been a positive inspiration. He could now await the lieutenant's next move in perfect composure of mind. He had himself undertaken all the extra work and worry involved in the arrival of the two other companies. Douaumont was now packed with men, and his Bavarians could no longer bewail a fate which was shared by more and more A.S.C. battalions. Not only had the Somme battle wrenched half the batteries out of the east bank Meuse sector, like the eyeteeth from a jaw; the sector had then been stripped of whole infantry brigades—how many nobody yet knew—which were to be replaced by A.S.C. and Landwehr. And they, monstrous as it all seemed, were, as Niggl knew, to relieve the infantry regiments of the heavy labour of constructing the support lines. It was a most unpleasant job; his men often had to run for their lives, and his casualty list had trebled. This time they had been let off pretty easily. Sergeant Pangerl had stopped a bullet in his hindquarters; five men, more or less damaged, were delighted at the prospect of being sent home; and two others looked like being out of it for good—bliss beyond all dreams.

Such were the captain's meditations as he tossed on his bed, trying to recover his morning sleep. He was lousy; he missed the warm bath which had become a habit since he had worn an officer's tunic in a foreign land; at home in

Weilheim he seldom took a bath. The vermin tormented him as though he had been a common private. At last, about half-past ten, he dropped asleep; his cell, as he called it, remained fairly dark in the daytime, but he fell into uneasy and unpleasant dreams, and his sleep was shattered in such a fashion that it brought him no refreshment.

When a missile strikes the roof beneath which you are asleep, you are awakened—unless you never awake again—by the crash of the hit. But if it lands near, fifty yards to the right or left, its shriek as it hurtles downwards bores into your stirring consciousness, and the five halting heart-beats between the moment you hear it and, wide awake, await the crash—that fraction of a minute saps the very structure of your soul. Punctual to the minute a second forty-centimetre mortar battery was firing at Fort Douaumont, this time at one of the projecting angles. The first shot landed about thirty yards to the right of the fort, on the pitted slope. Herr Niggl had slept through the rising scream of its approach, although his subconsciousness was on the alert. Unwittingly he was nearing the condition which his enemy was trying to induce; this was the first sign of collapse. He was awakened by the crash and thunder of the explosion, which shook the very foundations of the fort. A railway collision, he thought, still half asleep; he was in the Augsburg-Berlin sleeping-car, on his way to an official conference on the award of the freedom of Weilheim to Hindenburg. Then he awoke; he was not in a sleeping-car, he was in the most perilous spot in Europe, that was shell from a heavy gun, like the one before it; the French had started a bombardment, and now there wouldn't be a minute's peace. Ah—there was another—c-r-rash!—this was the end. “Saint Aloysius pray for me, now and in the hour of my death; I shall die unshriven and burn in hell for ever. Fetch a priest—I must confess . . .!” Oh, God!—another, screaming down upon the fort. It might be the foul Fiend himself, yelling as he swooped upon his victim. Where—where would it land?



Niggl dived under his blanket. The shattering crash, the echo rolling towards him through all the passages and tunnels, betokened safety. From the sound of the explosion it must have hit the north-east wing, his enemy's abode. Quivering all over, soaked in sweat, Niggl lay listening to the hurrying steps and shouts outside his door. But Alois Niggl told himself he was a fool to imagine that the French might have casually accounted for the second Kroysing brother. Such luck would be beyond all human expectation. His hair was dishevelled, and he was harassed by a fly eager to drink his sweat. At last Dillinger, orderly-room clerk, dashed in, and reported a direct hit on the sapper depot, no casualties. Smoothing the hair off his forehead, the captain asked calmly whether Lieutenant Kroysing had been informed of the company's latest losses; and whether he was then in the fort. Dillinger said yes to both questions. The Herr Lieutenant had just been summoned to a conference with the commandant, when the first one came over. Although everyone knew that a second must follow, the Herr Lieutenant ran out at once, and to save time went right across the inner yard, which was scattered with great shell-splinters. A most risky thing to do—"I can't think what we should do without him," said the captain. Then he added that he wanted the orderly room to get into touch with a Catholic chaplain to provide the men with spiritual consolation in case of extremity. Dillinger's face lit up; the orderly room should deal with the matter at once. As a matter of fact the division at present holding the sector was composed of Saxons and Protestants. But he was sure that something could be arranged. "Right, Dillinger," said the captain, "let me know when you've fixed it."

When Bertin of the A.S.C. heard of the Bavarian losses, he grew pale under his tan; Lieutenant Kroysing had begun to strike.

It was now September; and never had the front line

at that point been so quiet. There were good reasons for the Germans not attacking; but the French inactivity seemed rather ominous. It was a magical September; in that primeval woodland the little yellow leaves flickered in the golden sunshine, the long evenings were invitations to a game of skat, the two placid Badenens took turns at the switch-board with Bertin; and Friedrich Strumpf, the park-keeper of Schwetzingen, having convinced himself he had seen half-savage grey cats prowling about the patch of forest, he often went out with his rifle at midday, to try to get a catskin as a specific against his rheumatism. Every time he came back grumbling, without the catskin, and the poorer by two cartridges; the brutes simply wouldn't stand still. Meantime the hinder end of the valley was being stacked with baulks of timber of every size and shape. The rainy season was approaching. The engineers and sappers were preparing to relay the field railways at a higher level.

Almost every morning or afternoon, at times when visibility was bad, Bertin strolled over to the field howitzer emplacement, to get the letters. "You've got the youngest legs, my lad," observed the Badenens; "you still enjoy walking about." Which was true; for, apart from his natural curiosity, he had discovered that the lieutenant commanding the battery was a countryman and slight acquaintance of his own; one Lieutenant Paul Schanz, who years before had, as a resident abroad, sat for his matriculation examination with Bertin's class. He came from Russian Poland, where his father was working as foreman in a coal-mine. After this encounter he dropped something of his attitude of boredom; at the end of the second visit the tall, fair, brown-eyed officer asked Bertin to stop and play a game of chess. He proved a delightful companion. They sat at the entrance to the dug-out, with a box between them, leisurely shifting the white and black pieces and talking of all manner of things, past and present. They talked of the peace that must surely come at the

beginning of 1917; and Bertin learned all the secrets of the light field-howitzer, its mechanism, range, and usage.

Lieutenant Schanz, smart and well shaven, with his smooth skin and boyish laugh, in a burst of confidence told him how his men were getting into all sorts of bad habits, partly out of boredom; they were fed up with the whole business; they no longer used a charge of salt to dim the gun flashes, because they did not want to have to clean the dirty barrels; they had left their carbines behind at the rest camp, to prevent the locks getting rusty—there was indeed a good deal of water among the rocks; and, incidentally, he had not got the prescribed supply of canister shells, for use at close quarters. "We don't want the stuff here. Franz won't break through, we'll see to that, and we want all the shrapnel and shells we can get." And so, under a green tarpaulin behind the guns, lay a supply of what was called canister, but was in fact a dump of three hundred shrapnel.

The battery seldom fired. There were strict orders to be sparing of ammunition, with the added purpose of eluding the French observers. On all the higher points keen-eyed men peered out of the trenches on both sides, calculating the distance of a gun position from the interval between the flash and the explosion. Thus, and with the aid of the captive balloons, the maps of both antagonists became gradually dotted with indications of the enemy gun-pits; the day was approaching when they would be needed. Bertin too looked through a periscope in Lieutenant Schanz's observation post, cunningly emplaced under a projecting rock behind the guns, while a barrel in a beech tree eighty yards away deceived the French airmen. In that uncanny instrument he could see slopes and scarred hillsides and tiny creatures moving, all vividly alive, and walls of earth, and little hollows: and small clouds that drifted past and vanished. The ridges of Belleville, explained Schanz; beyond the horizon lay a French battery, probably four hundred yards to the



rear, 5,500 yards from barrel to barrel. "I wonder if there's a Schanz over yonder sitting in a burrow and marking down our battery through a thing like this." Bertin would not be parted from the marvellous instrument. "Just an aid to destruction," he said, shaking his head and staring once more into the two grey-rimmed glasses. "When will these marvels be used to better purpose?" "After the peace, of course," said his companion. "As soon as those fellows understand they can't destroy us." In that hope they were both at one, and they strolled back through the soft sunlit air to smoke or take a nap, as they might feel inclined. Paul Schanz expected to get a post in the administration of the Upper Silesian mines, where his father was employed. It would be a pretty strenuous life. The mines, wrote the father, were being sadly neglected; it was impossible to get any replacements made, and water and gas were getting into the workings. German coal was one of the most important instruments of war; the neutrals and allies wanted all they could get; train after train left the Upper Silesian railway stations and went right through to Constantinople, Aleppo, or Haifa. However, Bertin was often too impatient to spend more than half an hour on these visits.

On one occasion he had missed his friends, who were up in front digging pits for new mine-throwers; half-way through October there was to be a local attack to straighten out the infantry positions. Next time he arranged to meet Süssmann, and as they chatted on the way, the latter mentioned the casualties that had so put the wind up Captain Niggel. "Our young poet is horrified at the burden on the Herr Lieutenant's conscience," said Süssmann mockingly, soon after they reached Kroysing's billet, inhaling a deep draught of cigarette smoke. Bertin, in enjoyment of the first few puffs of a freshly filled pipe, calmly met the astonished look in Kroysing's grey eyes. He realized at once that he must choose his words if he were not to give offence. "Four dead," said he, "and

many wounded—you can't regard them with indifference, surely." "Why not?" asked Kroysing. "Does that need an answer?" replied Bertin; whereupon the lieutenant told Bertin not to get above himself, and to think before he spoke. "Am I responsible for the war? Obviously not. Nor did I raise Captain Niggel's battalion, that was done by some area command. And the fact that the men are under my orders—well, the ultimate authority for that is the Crown Prince's signature. What do you expect me to do?" "All that," said Bertin, "is very true, sir; but will you just answer one small and perhaps incidental question: who had these men shifted to Douaumont, and why?" "Why?" shouted Kroysing. "Because they were needed here." Bertin quivered, flushed, and was silent. He did not suggest that a man who shouted was in the wrong; he merely resolved to take his leave as soon as possible. Kroysing, still frowning darkly, and annoyed at his own outburst, bit his lips, glared into vacancy, and then at his startled visitor. "Forgive me," he said at last, "but your simple-mindedness gets on one's nerves." "That's a pity," answered Bertin; "your tobacco tasted so good and now my simple-mindedness had spoilt it for me." Kroysing reflected; the man was touchy, of course, that was the good side of the sentimentality that had provoked that outburst. "My lad," said he, "you are very green. I can see I shall have to be careful how I tread on the toes of the A.S.C. What about a spot to show there's no ill feeling?" He opened the little cupboard on the right behind him—he was so tall that he needed only to stretch out his arm—extracted the familiar bottle, and filled the glasses. "Well, here's how," he said. Bertin sipped his drink, Süßmann swallowed half a glass, Kroysing poured his slowly and ecstatically down his throat. "Ah," he said, "that's the stuff. War can be carried on without women, without ammunition, even without trenches, but not without tobacco, and certainly not without alcohol." Bertin, in an effort to master his mortification, enlarged

on the Serbian plum brandy, which was nearly as heartening as this cognac. Kroysing pretended to be very much interested, and observed that when he had had enough of the western front, *slivovitz* might tempt him to ask for a transfer to Macedonia. . . . But the atmosphere still remained overcast. Little Süssmann looked knowingly from one to the other. "No," said he, "that's no use. You must face the issue. After all I did the damage, and I must put it straight. Our poet means that you got these fellows to Douaumont, and you are responsible for what happens to them, because you have a private reckoning to settle with their captain. Am I right?" Bertin nodded. "The Bavarian A.S.C. men were, for you, mere appanages of Captain Niggl. But our good friend's moral searchlight is now turned full upon them; look—some are dead and some are wounded. Mortal men, eh? And now it's your turn, sir," he added, turning to his lieutenant, as he stubbed out his cigarette; the flattened brass casing of a large trench-mortar shell served as an ash-tray. Kroysing pondered for a moment. "Sergeant Süssmann deserves credit for putting the problem fairly. Let us consider these men. Did they stir a finger to support my brother? No. And yet it was for their advantage that my brother gave offence to Niggl & Co. And so, broadly speaking, they share the guilt of his death. Wherefore I consigned them, broadly speaking, to a rather riskier frying-pan than the one they had been occupying. So much responsibility I will assume, as any A.S.C. company would have served the purpose. I chose this one." Bertin took another sip at his brandy and reflected. "I'm afraid," he said, "that there's something wrong there. The dead and wounded far outweigh the degree of guilt that falls on the individual, for the company's guilt is a collective guilt; you must also remember that the common soldier is not a free agent." "Oh, they must all settle that up between them, those that got hit, and those that didn't." Kroysing said shortly, "I don't play Providence. But what of your



own share in the business?" Bertin eyed him with astonishment. "Look at the innocent angel," laughed Kroysing. "Someone must have run his nose into it to start with. Who raised the whole affair, hey? Who shook me out of my culpable indifference? Who told me of the trick that had been played on my brother? The layman marvels and the expert is surprised," he said triumphantly, in a phrase that was current at the time.

Bertin, wholly taken aback, looked at Süssmann, then at Kroysing's victorious countenance, then meditatively up at the vaulted concrete mass that lay between himself and the sky. "I never thought of that," he confessed candidly; "there's certainly something in it. The confusion of cause and effect rather obscures the issue. But I didn't mean that this should happen." "Exactly. Nor did I. But answer me this, my friend: would you have kept silent if someone had told you what a dangerous man I am? Didn't you intend me to stand forth as a champion of outraged justice, as a brother of the victim, and didn't you think I was the best man to do it?" "Yes," admitted Bertin, in agonized self-examination. "That was roughly my motive, though I hadn't quite defined it. Something horrible had happened, the world was out of joint; but it seems crazy that you should put it still further out of joint because we're trying to set it right." "Yes," laughed Kroysing genially, "this old world is a bit faulty in construction, so far as we understand it. Misfires and short circuits at all ends and corners. If we built a motor on those lines we should probably get to heaven quicker than from here to our new mine-throwers." "But where is the mistake?" asked Bertin passionately. "There's a wrong that must be righted if our ideals are not to be destroyed." "But why shouldn't they be destroyed?" asked Sergeant Süssmann in astonishment. "Are they worth so much? Aren't yours destroyed"—pointing a crooked forefinger at Kroysing—"aren't mine destroyed?" and he turned his finger towards himself.

"The ideals of poets and prophets are sacrosanct, I suppose. Four dead and about forty wounded," he went on, "and in Douaumont. If it wasn't so boring for the Herr Lieutenant, we really ought to tell the fellow the story of this hollow hill, as I who sit here saw it and lived through it. Anyhow, I promised him I would." "Don't mind me," said Kroysing. "I shall be interested to watch the expression of our poet's face. Fire away, Süssmann. When the Lord God turned his face away from the earth, a few thousand years after the Flood, and men had multiplied like ants, they sallied forth from their trenches on February 21 of the year nineteen hundred and sixteen, sappers to the fore. . . ."

Süssman blinked and took up the tale: "In those four days, while the attack went forward, legions and legions of grey and blue-grey martyrs died as they were bidden; their bodies were scattered between Caures wood and the hills, and their souls increased the heavenly hosts by at least an army corps."



## CHAPTER II: LITTLE SÜSSMANN

"WE lay flat on the ground, at the edge of the glacis, and peered across at Douaumont, where it lay snow-clad and silent—we, a detachment of sappers, and with us a platoon of the Twenty-fourth, to which we were attached. The ground was frozen hard, but we were hot, as we had all been drinking and we had the wind up too. Not a shot came from over yonder, mark my words, not one! Who would ever have thought that it lay ungarrisoned and undefended, the cornerstone of Verdun? French shells were dropping on the woods behind us, but they came from elsewhere; our own artillery was bombarding the village of Douaumont and the barbed wire outside it, and from there came the rattle of a French machine-gun. But the great mass of masonry was silent. We were wearing our overcoats, but we were soaked through underneath, and it's no joke crawling through frozen mud; we wanted to get something dry underfoot, take our clothes off, light a stove, and sleep. Our artillery kept on hammering at the smooth escarpments of the casements, and never a sound in answer. At last we made a rush, the lieutenant leading, up the slope to the barbed wire—luckily it wasn't electrified—and soon we were clambering over the mighty roof of Douaumont. So far so good, but we had still to get inside. While we were arguing and peering into the depths beneath us, we caught sight of a handful of men creeping out of a tunnel, and before we or they could shoot, we realized that they were our next-door neighbours in the line. The officers glared at each other with some disgust, and I fancy they're still disputing which of them was the genuine conqueror of Douaumont. Once inside,

we captured the garrison: some twenty gunners in an armoured turret. They had been firing for four days and nights and were then asleep—too worn out to ask us to step inside. However, we forgave them. Such was the storming of Douaumont by the heroic first battalion of the Twenty-Fourth Regiment, and the man that don't believe it is hereby fined one taler."

Kroysing revelled in Bertin's bewilderment: this private in the A.S.C. had apparently believed in all the panoply of the supreme command, and lived in a world of heroic deeds like a child in a fairy book. "And that was the famous storming of Douaumont? Under His Majesty's eyes . . ." The walls re-echoed with wild laughter. "Spare us, my dear chap," shouted Kroysing. And Süßmann, chuckling like a malignant dwarf, gasped out: "Where was Douaumont, and where was the Kaiser?"

"Well," said Bertin good-humouredly, "that's what was published in the communiqué. We read it at Brigade Headquarters in Vranje, a little mountain town to the north of Kumanovo in Macedonia—a crowd of field-greys in the bright spring sunshine, and I can still hear the voice of a young hussar lieutenant shout out: 'Well, I'm damned, then the bloody war will soon be over.' How was I to know what it looked like in reality?" "My lad," shouted Kroysing once more, his eyes glittering in the light of the third glass of cognac, "don't you yet know that the whole thing is a put-up show—in the rear, in the front line, on our side, and on theirs; we bluff and they bluff—only the dead don't bluff and they're the only people I respect . . ." "Nothing is true," said Sergeant Süßmann, "and everything is permitted. You know the phrase? It's the motto of the Assassins." Bertin said: "Yes, he had been to school, and had heard about the Assassins, a medieval Eastern murder-sect ruled by a sheikh who was called 'the Old Man of the Mountain.'"

"Glad to hear it," said Kroysing, "we've been to school, too, and we'd like to know how lads like you come to be

knocking about the world—a Parsifal in regulation boots, that's what you are. That motto, my dear sir, is in full force here. Nothing is true that you see in print, including the Bible, and all men are permitted to do exactly what they like, including you and me if we've only got the guts. However, I won't hold up the little man; he wants to tell you a yarn of what goes on hereabouts; but if you believe what was put in the report, that at the beginning of March we took Fort Vaux, and then on the next day generously abandoned to the French 'the ruins of the armoured fortress,' you deserve the Iron Cross. How we did laugh, my lad! But the infantry were furious, as they lay under heavy fire all the time from those terrible concrete defences, and all sorts of people got busy on the telephone just because some staff fool with a pair of field glasses, God knows how many kilometres to the rear, saw some German prisoners trooping into the fort, and took them for conquerors making a triumphal entry. Fort Vaux fell in June, if you want to know, and it's a miracle that the place held out so long. It's only on paper that the war always proceeds according to plan. Damn all writing jackals." And he poured out his fourth cognac, a smaller one this time, and drank. "And now, my little man, you go on with the story; I won't say another word."

"Well," said Sergeant Süssmann, "we had Douaumont, at any rate, and we held it: but the French advance positions weren't far below, and the counter-attacks began. By the end of April the French were actually trampling about above our heads; as far as the north-west corner they recovered the whole of the upper works, but the machine-guns in the embrasure and the flank positions still held on; and then reinforcements came up, and they had to make long noses and depart. At that time we learnt from prisoners that we owed our success at the end of February to the usual sort of military mix-up. On the right and left of Douaumont a fresh division had taken over the sector; each was convinced that the other was



holding the fort, and the relieved division had been so hurriedly withdrawn that no one could explain how things stood. If we'd had any fresh reserves just then, we could have pushed forward beyond Souville and Fleury, and Verdun might have been German by now. We'd have found ourselves in for trouble, but it would have got our tails up, and think of the war bulletins! However, the moment passed, and the French weren't giving us anything for nothing, we had to attack Fleury and Thiaumont, and that we were still doing at the time of the great explosion, when I got a glimpse into the Hereafter. Here's how!"

He drained his glass; Kroysing filled it up again, and Süßmann continued in his even boyish voice: "In those days, at the beginning of May, Douaumont was the strongest supporting point on the whole front, packed with soldiers, stores, ammunition, sapper equipment, and it contained a large dressing-station. It was like a huge communicating tunnel, leading to the front and back again. The Bavarians attacking Fleury, or who were to attack it later, slept there, or flung themselves exhausted somewhere on the pavement and dropped asleep where they lay. The great attack of May 5 failed, after a terrific bombardment, but life underground went on as busily as ever. At that time our depot was over yonder where the A.S.C. men sleep now, under the armoured turret, where the ammunition dump used to be, and there were still a few dozen shells left. Our mines and the reserve tanks for the flame-thrower oil were stored there; together with more innocent stuff such as flares and so on, stacked in rows against the passage wall; and on the other side, crates of hand-grenades. On the right of the passage a flight of steps led down to the hospital rooms where the doctors were busy day and night, orderlies dashed back and forth bringing in the serious cases, while the lighter casualties and those who had merely been shell-shocked or buried crouched against the walls, asleep or dozing,

until they got a ration of soup which they gulped down and felt they were stepping into heaven. But, as we all know, hell lies very near to heaven, and there must have been a few lunatics among them too; for, under cover of the crates of flares, two or three of these blasted Bavarians set about warming up their food with a hand-grenade—it had got too cold for them, you see. Any man can unscrew an infantry hand-grenade, and use the head, which contains the charge of powder, to warm up his food, if he's got two stones on which to stand the cooking-pot, and there's very little risk in it. But, as ill luck would have it, my Bavarians came upon one that had been already filed off, or was defective, and the whole contraption exploded in their faces. This might have remained their own private affair; a few yells and three or four more dead and wounded counted for nothing in the fighting for Fleury. But those splinters shot through the open door into the ammunition dump and cracked one of our harmless flame-throwers. They are charged with a blend of heavy and light oils; the stuff oozed out, vaporized, and contact with the air transformed it into an explosive. I saw it with my own eyes; though I don't of course know where the bit of burning wood came from that set fire to it—a smouldering cigarette would have done the trick. There were shouts of fire from all round the struggling group of cooks; some heavy fragments were hurled up to the roof, and the burning oil trickled to the neat dry pinewood crates of rockets. Then we started to run; some, who were sensible, in silence, and some yelling with terror. You saw that long tunnel where I met the Herr Captain just now? It is eighty yards long, I believe. From all the side passages men ran into that tunnel and fought for their lives with their own friends and comrades. The man who tripped or turned round was lost. We of the sapper depot were nearly the hindmost; in front of us were the walking wounded, the Bavarians who had just been relieved, A.S.C. men in the side pas-

sages, and the infantry in front—a yelling turmoil of field-grey backs and necks and heads and fists. From the rear came crashes, bursts of smoke and fumes, and the acrid reek of the exploding rockets like a lunatic fire-work display. It was bound to reach the ammunition, and it did. But first it reached the hand-grenades; from behind us came a thunderous roar, then a shock like an earthquake caught us all and flung us against the walls, myself included. At that moment I had got about forty yards down the tunnel when I fell. Or rather I didn't fall, I fainted; flattened against that curved wall I lost consciousness and hung, I don't know for how long, wedged in among that huddled throng, and as they dropped I expect I dropped too. Then must have come the explosion that wiped out every living being in that tunnel, in the side-passages, the hospital, and the casemates. I had been choked by the poisonous gases; and, subjectively speaking, I was dead. So long as a man can feel fear, it's awful—you gasp for air and breathe in more and more of the poisonous muck, your gullet burns, and there's a roaring in your ears; but oblivion was deliverance. Well, here's how!"

Bertin, intent and eager, at last emptied his glass, and Süßmann went on, like a man emerging from a moment of the distant past. "When I came back to myself, I was lying in the rain under the open sky, on a heap of wreckage in the inner yard, and looking vaguely up at certain strange grey clouds rolling over my head. My inner self felt raw and scorched, but I was alive. It was probably quite a while before I gave any signs of life. I noticed men in smoke masks dragging bodies out of the blackened tunnel, from the mouth of which curled a black plume of smoke. I wanted to see how late it was; my watch had gone. On my left hand I always wore a small ring, a legacy from my grandmother, set with a lucky turquoise; it too had gone. I felt for my cigarette case; gone, and gone for ever. My tunic had been unbuttoned, my shirt



ripped open, and my chest was bare; it was this that had probably awakened me and saved my life, but my pocket book with a fair amount of pay in it had also disappeared. I then sat up, the damp pavement stones eased my burning hands, and, to the right and left of me, before me and behind me, I could see nothing but dead men: blue, congested, blackened faces. Four hundred men in column take up a good deal of space, but here lay many more, and the orderlies were continually carrying in fresh corpses. My pockets had been picked, but I did not grudge what I had lost, for I was breathing air once more. I never want to be hanged, and I never want to be choked, and I'll never turn on the gas tap. The very thought of a gas attack makes me vomit. No, a shell-splinter in the head, or a clean shot through the heart—that's good enough for me. Then I buttoned up my tunic, I even turned up my collar and staggered to my feet. I felt giddy, I was coughing and I had a racking headache, but that was all. The Assistant M.O. who saw me first was fairly staggered. 'Well, you're a lucky man,' were his first words. I was already a sergeant at the time, but I had forgotten that. I was still a bit bemused, so I saluted and said: 'Corporal Süssmann, sir,' and I'm told I grinned feebly as I did so. But that I regard as a libel. I was given something to drink, aspirin for my headache, a few whiffs of oxygen, and then I was able to talk for a couple of minutes. I didn't know much about it all, but what I knew was enough to decide them not to clear out that extinguished crater. Our captain had the dead all carried back again; but I slept in a fine bed, in a new hospital section, though on a kapok mattress of course; and when I woke up for the second time, I was perfectly all right. I wasn't coughing any more, there was still a sort of ring of raw flesh in my neck, and my head throbbed a bit, but that was all. Later on I saw the building squad walling up those passages. There they lie to this day, the dead garrison of Douaumont, one battalion strong,

every man that was housed in the further end of that wing; Bavarians, sappers, A.S.C., and the dressing-station. That was the explosion in Douaumont; it wasn't reported, and if you like, I'll take you to the place one day, and you can pray for the souls of the fallen. Since then I've seen things more as they really are, and I don't admire them any more. And now you must be getting along."

Bertin said yes, he must; he was glad to have heard the story. But a doubt still hovered in his mind. "And did you go on duty at once as though nothing had happened?" he asked, stretching himself. "Well, what do you think?" snapped Sergeant Süßmann. "I got some convalescent leave at home, fourteen glorious days of May, and I never mentioned that explosion. Civilians don't like you to spoil their cherished picture of the war by telling them the truth; besides we were ordered to keep our mouths shut."

"Sure," said Lieutenant Kroysing, "and it's an old saw that a man who knows too much dies young. Well, what had Captain Niggel got to say in answer to my sympathetic inquiry after his health? Will he be able to turn out this evening?" Sergeant Süßmann reported gravely that the captain still felt very bad; the doctor had recommended him to stay in bed, now that there were three regimental sergeant-majors present who could take his place. Kroysing replied with equal gravity: "I'm sorry; I so dislike making myself such a nuisance to a brother-officer, I'm such poor company, too. When you come back, my friend," he added, as he got up and gave Bertin his hand, "I'm afraid the poor man's health will be worse."

Sergeant Süßmann tilted his cap at such an angle that the two badges dangled over the bridge of his nose; he would, he said, walk a little of the way home with Bertin. Then he asked whether the Herr Lieutenant had not taken too favourable a view of Herr Captain Niggel's health? The telephone exchange had, on instructions from his orderly room, been inquiring for a Catholic



field chaplain. He would arrive within the next few days, if Franz didn't get above himself in the meantime.

A faint smile hovered round Kroysing's lips. "So he wants to make his confession?" he said. "Well, that does a man no harm when he's beginning to go rotten. Thanks, Süssmann; after that bit of news I feel inclined to turn out tonight myself."

### CHAPTER III: FATHER LOCHNER

“It’s going to be a hard winter,” observed Strumpf, the park-keeper, a morning or two later as he stepped out of his hut, which had once been a French blockhouse. Blue sky and shafts of sunlight pierced the drifting clouds; the golden foliage of the beeches was laden with beechnuts; and red berries glittered among the leaves of the mountain ashes, barberries, and bramble bushes. Unperturbed by the approaching thunder a pair of squirrels scampered up and down the branches, scaring away a magpie, which fled with an indignant scream. “We don’t want a hard winter,” objected his comrade Kilian in broad Baden dialect.

Through the open window Bertin at his switchboard heard Friedrich Strumpf enlarging on the great frosts, before which Nature always provided a rich fruit harvest for the birds and beasts, as though someone were caring for the innocent creatures. Kilian, who worked in a tobacco factory, burst out laughing; he was a free-thinker, a Darwinist, as he proudly explained; he found the struggle for existence everywhere confirmed, and thought it would be nice if something were done for women and children during a hard winter. He sat at ease in the early autumn sunshine, knitting a woollen sock. He had plenty of time for knitting: and his wife, who had taken his place in the factory and brought up two children, could hardly be expected to see to his winter underclothes. Every individual in the army was attached, like Bertin himself, to threads that travelled backwards far behind the lines. A buzz on the switchboard, and he found himself listening to instructions from the sapper depot about switching the points,

inquiries as to the builders' squad and the number of trucks on the siding. The affairs of the little railways always amused Bertin; this tiny link in the vast network showed the degree of foresight needed to manage the machinery of a front line, and how every detail had to be settled so that, when the hour struck, the blow might be driven home with full force and precision. The two Badeners liked Bertin. They merely wagged their heads over his frequent visits to the howitzer battery and on to Douaumont. Karl Kilian understood him better than his older colleague; it was natural and proper for a journalist to see all he could, said he, so that he could set it all down in writing later on.

Bertin was well aware that this good time must end. In a few days his predecessor would return from leave, and he would have to pack up and return to the stuffy, noisy hutments; back to the company, to the pestilential proximity of Grassnick and Glinsky, where all the finer feelings were flattened out like trampled grass. Massed numbers seemed to drain the sap out of a man. Here he had begun to recover; he slept in good air; there was sunshine and leisure; and he enjoyed the little dishes which Strumpf prepared so ingeniously out of the army rations. In the night hours, spent in wakefulness at the silent switchboard, with a book at his side under the electric light, in the solitude and stillness, he recovered his own being. Often he looked through the printed pages at young Kroysing, now swept so far along the stream of experience, and his sinister brother, who was wading into it and would find himself waist-deep tomorrow. More than any man Eberhard Kroysing had needed the war to realize himself, to express his being and to test his reach, as he himself put it. In this exalted impulse all the youth of Germany has escaped from the cramping life of pre-war days, into the freedom of the war—Kroysing, Süssmann, Bertin, and all the rest. In 1914 all men felt that real life, the life of peril and endurance, was now to begin at last; and here they were, engulfed in



horrible realities, with which it was their duty to deal. Who could have predicted to Süssmann, the schoolboy, how he would feel two years later and what he would have been through? . . . Well, well! . . . And then Süssmann's cheerful voice began to mutter in Bertin's ear. He had a message for him from the company, at least from the Fosses wood section, with which he done a long job of work the day before. Two Berliners in particular had been asking for him—a jolly fellow with a fat face and freckles and very intelligent eyes (“Lebede,” said Bertin, nodding to himself) and a bent, bad-tempered little chap (“Aha, Pahl!”). All sorts of things had been happening in the company, and he had better get back as soon as he could, if only to welcome a new sergeant-major, a bit of news he would no doubt be glad to hear. Bertin listened with disgust. Next week this would be his world again, day in day out. . . . “Yes,” he said to himself, quoting the poet Schiller, “the grand days of Aranjuez would soon be over.” “But you must come and say good-bye to us,” said the lad. “Kroysing's got a lot to tell you; and he wants you to come and stay over tomorrow night with us.” “Yes, I can fix that,” said Bertin, in some surprise; he would come before the evening bombardment, so that the barrage shouldn't spoil his journey.

At the entrance tunnel of the fort Bertin fell in with a throng of infantry, waiting for darkness to fall before moving up to the front line. There was a mighty issuing of rations, and the men's cooking-pots were steaming for the last time perhaps for weeks; in one corner of the yard N.C.O.'s were bending over mailbags and calling out the names of their squads: “Wädchen!” “Here!” “Sauerbier!” “Here!” “Klotzsche!” “Here!” “Frauenfeind!” “Here!” Bertin, as he made his way among them, smelt their smells from near at hand, and marked their gaunt faces, the taut skin over the cheekbones, and their tense expressions. Few of them above middle height, and all in poor condition. He felt guilty in their presence because he

looked alert and fresh, and almost well fed. Their lilting Saxon speech softened the bitterness of their talk. In their field caps—which they did not exchange for steel helmets until they got into the line—and their threadbare tunics, they had a half-grown air, more like a sixth form out for an excursion than the living wall which, in the jargon of the newspapers, was defending the homeland on French soil.

It was about five in the afternoon; the rich, golden September sunshine flooded the vast inner chamber of the five-angled fortress and the deep embrasure that led up to the casemates. Patiently Bertin threaded his way through the assembled throng, who stood surrounded by bundles of bombs, equipment, and gas-masks. Their rifles were plugged with bright steel caps, and the locks were wrapped in rags to protect them against the dusty trenches and shell-holes. A group which had already fed stopped him and asked for a light. Bertin lingered by them for a few minutes; his grey oil-cloth cap with the yellow brass cross aroused their curiosity, and his spectacles suggested that he ought to know the hour when peace would come. Weariness was stamped upon their brows, and they made no effort to disguise it; but Bertin knew they would none the less do all that men could do.

As usual, their days of rest had brought no refreshment; they had been sent to improve rear positions, bring up supplies and material, and subjected to constant roll-calls and drill to restore their discipline. Their only advantage as compared with the front line consisted in hot food, undisturbed sleep, and plenty of water for washing. All this was something, but it was not much. To Bertin's vision, as they thronged the fort, they seemed like animated fragments of the wrecked defences, fragments that looked as though disease had eaten them away and broken down their powers of resistance. The shell-holes were almost edge to edge, though scraps of ochrous turf still remained in the shadow of the ramparts; but the brickwork had

everywhere been flung outwards into the entrenchment or inwards where it blocked the tunnel mouths. The ramparts were no more than mounds of earth dotted with steel splinters—a strange ruin when compared with the subterranean fortress, still unshaken and impregnable. Unshaken also were the fighting men. They looked like jaded multitudes of death, workers in the factory of destruction, marked with the listlessness that industry and the machine impresses on humanity. But their hearts were whole; indifferent and disillusioned, they made their way up to the front, buoyed up solely by the hope that they might return in ten days safe and sound. And so, back and forward, until released by wounds or death. But they did not dwell on that. They meant to live; they hoped to see their homes again. And now they wanted to get a couple of hours sleep.

Bertin, brooding on their destiny, clambered down past a pile of sandbags into the entrails of the fortress. Being without a guide, he lost himself at once. At last he found himself in the telephone exchange, where a man in spectacles, just like himself, set him on his way. With the Saxon speech still echoing in his ears, he was almost taken aback by the crisp Hanoverian of the telephonist. He himself was a Silesian; he was going to see a Franconian, and a born Berliner; the tribes had indeed become thoroughly intermixed, and learned a little mutual respect.

Kroysing, who called out curtly: "Come in!" had a visitor whom Bertin did not know. On the bed lay a sort of riding-hat with one upturned brim. Violet tabs on his collar, a plump tanned oval face with an exceptionally small mouth, two very bright and very keen eyes; a priest. An army chaplain in Douaumont, with a silver cross at his neck! Bertin knew that these fellows had to be saluted like officers and that they attached great importance to the point; and he wished he could escape. But Lieutenant Kroysing, seated as always behind his work-table, said with emphatic cordiality: "Here you are, at last, my friend.



May I introduce you two gentlemen? Herr Bertin, barrister-at-law, at present got up as a private in the A.S.C. and Father Benedikt Lochner, at present dressed as a cavalry trooper." The priest laughed heartily and gave Bertin a plump but powerful hand. "I don't know about that, sir, I arrived on the pillion of a motor bicycle, like any young Berliner's girl-friend." And he looked very genial as he smoothed his fair rather dishevelled hair, wiped his tonsure with a pocket-handkerchief, observed that he found it very hot down below, and swallowed a sip of brandy. His Rhineland speech, broad and jovial, came rather oddly from those delicate lips. "My friend Bertin may certainly hear what we have to say, Father Benedikt," said Kroysing, resuming the conversation; "in point of fact he ought to be present. He spoke to my poor brother the very day before his death, heard from his own lips what was weighing on his mind and promised to help him; the only human being in this desert—or should I say this vale of tears?—who did; and I shan't forget it to the day of my death. He's a Jew, but you won't mind that compared with Protestant heretics; he's a chip of the same block."

Bertin sat gloomily on Kroysing's bed. The priest was observing him, the curve of his skull, and the beginning of a bald patch on the crown. This young man, he thought, looks like a monk in some well-known painting, I don't remember which—an Italian one, no doubt; he may be a help or a hindrance in what is to come; he is obviously depressed and apprehensive. And the priest said aloud that he did not know whether Captain Niggel would stand an audience of three.

Bertin was about to get up, but Kroysing stretched out a long arm. He said: "You stay where you are. If you'd like to postpone our discussion, Father Lochner, I am quite agreeable. This is Bertin's last visit, and I propose to give him a parting present, a rather special memento. I'm going up to the front line tonight; our mine-throwers are in position, and the section officers want a word with



me; I take it you're prepared to join us, Bertin. Everyone ought to have seen the show."

Bertin flushed; of course he would come, he said. "When Süssmann spoke to me, I expected some sort of celebration; but this I much prefer." And Father Lochner boomed out that he would like to join them if he might. Kroysing eyed his long tunic, his baggy riding-breeches, and his neat laced boots. "Won't it spoil your uniform?" And as the priest vehemently repudiated the suggestion, he went on: "You'll find plenty of Christian men, Lutherans indeed, but distinctions disappear in the trenches. A Jew or an atheist is just as good machine-gun fodder as a Catholic and a Protestant. The position that we're going to visit was relieved yesterday; the lads here in the fort have come at a bad time, I'm afraid; they come from over to the right, more to the West. Do you want to put off our little business? Very well. Though I wish we could get it over now."

Glad of any pretext, Bertin got up. "If I'm not going to get any sleep tonight," he said, "I think I'd better touch Süssmann for a bed and lie down a lot. I must have some rest."

As the door closed behind Bertin, the priest said meditatively: "Not an easy life for an educated man; it's a constant surprise how well Jews adapt themselves to army life." "Why shouldn't they?" replied Kroysing. "They do what everyone else is doing, and often much better; and they want to prove it. After all, there's no more bellicose book than the Old Testament."

The priest deftly parried this thrust by reverting to generalities. The trench war had in fact dispelled many prejudices, not only against the Jews. The soldier from the industrial areas had always been regarded as a doubtful quantity. What about him now? Kroysing agreed: the men from the cities, particularly the larger cities, were the backbone of the line. They were more at ease with mechanism than the country lads. The latter had perhaps provided the best human material in the first year of the



war; but the trench war demanded a more flexible intelligence, more adaptability. "And while we're talking about the country," interposed Father Lochner abruptly, "What is the trouble between yourself and Captain Niggel?"

Kroysing leaned back. "He must have told you that when he asked you to intervene." "We had a talk," replied the chaplain, slowly rubbing his hands together. "He gave me the impression of a man in great distress of mind. You had differed, he said, about your brother, whom you thought he had misused in some way." "Didn't he tell you any more than that?" asked Kroysing, without moving a muscle of his face. "No, at least I couldn't gather any more. These Bavarians are all ultimately peasants, and when they talk they express themselves in such a way that you can make much or little out of it according as you happen to know them or not."

Kroysing lit a cigarette and threw the match into the shell case. "Assume the man was lying; how is that consistent with the respect he owes you as his spiritual pastor, and the prospect of hell-fire?" Father Lochner laughed. "For two years I was curate at Kochl, at the foot of the mountains. I didn't get very deep into the people there; that would take a lifetime. But I picked up a little. In confession no one would lie to me, especially as they only need to speak in generalities. But in everyday life they would take a positive pride in bamboozling me and exploiting my spiritual authority into the bargain." "Good," said Kroysing. "I'm glad you can take the broad view." "Of course I can," said the priest genially; "I should be a pretty sort of fool if I couldn't. Man is a frail article, and as against yourself the Catholic merely scores by his consciousness of original sin, and his resort to the supernatural properties of the sacraments and the Church to help him to withstand that frailty."

Kroysing listened to the good man with a satisfaction that he was careful to conceal. Had Niggel really represented their feud as so trivial? Army chaplains get

bored, and all the more so when they are able men and embedded in staff billets and condemned to the society of wooden-headed base hounds; Father Lochner might well have ventured on the motor bicycle to Doaumont for the sake of a change, and without demanding any very adequate reasons. For a former theological student the chance of composing a quarrel between two officers offered a tempting prospect. Well, he would get the surprise of his life at Douaumont. "What, my dear Father Lochner, is your opinion of the story of King David and his captain Uriah? Forgive my asking such a direct question."

The priest stiffened. "It was murder," said he, "calculated, shameless murder for the sake of a woman, a mortal sin, to be expiated by the House of David. The grandson of that connexion lost the larger part of his kingdom, in spite of David's remorse and Solomon's achievements." "Well then," observed Kroysing casually, "what penalties, temporal and eternal, are to be visited on the Niggl dynasty? That is precisely the sin for which I am pursuing the Herr Captain. Only the lady in this case was not called Bathsheba, but 'the Reputation of the Third Company.'" Father Lochner sat up very straight and stiff. "You must make yourself perfectly clear, Herr Lieutenant if you propose to bring such a charge as that."

Kroysing was delighted to have stirred the priest out of his good humour. "Cast your eye on these," he said, opened a drawer, took out two papers, handed the uppermost and larger one to the priest, and asked him to read it.

Father Lochner carefully adjusted his horn spectacles; then he read Christoph Kroysing's last letter. As he read his lips moved and his eyes passed conscientiously from each word to the next. Kroysing marked this with appreciation. "The state of the paper and the writing doesn't seem to trouble you, Father. When the letter reached us here, it was in something of a mess, you can see some traces in the corner there." "Blood?" asked Father Lochner with a shudder. "Horrible. . . . But, Herr Lieutenant, if I may

say so without offence, have you proofs of any kind? Herr Captain Niggel—well, he seems a good-natured sort of fellow. Though, of course, I wouldn't attach too much importance to such an impression." His voice shook.

"My dear sir," said his antagonist quizzically, "do you still attach importance to appearances? Haven't you discovered after two years of this sort of thing that the consciousness of power is very bad for a great many people? The average man needs an average pressure to keep him functioning normally. The infallibility of the warrior caste transports such people into too rarefied an air, and Niggel & Co. get above themselves. A bagman or a tax-collector with any wits about him permits himself to behave like King David, except that he slinks behind other people's backs at the sight of the avenger's fist," and he raised his right hand, curving the fingers into a claw.

"Tell me the story," said Father Lochner, with a catch at his breath.



## CHAPTER IV: TWO SUBORDINATES

MEANWHILE the two weary soldiers, Süssmann and Bertin, lay on iron bunks, one above the other, in a former guard-room that now accommodated fifteen men, Kroysing's sappers, in charge of the routine work in the depot and outside it. The two men were smoking cigars and talking to each other. Bertin, on the lower bunk, felt rather excited at the prospects of the expedition. "Do gentlemen of the cloth make you feel queer, as they do me—even our own rabbis?" "Don't see much of 'em," growled Süssmann. "The likes of us often do," said Bertin. "There was a Whitsun service here before Verdun, which we were all ordered to attend, no more than six months ago; the chaplain preached about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and all around us were piles of wicker crates with yellow and green crosses on the labels." "That's a bit thick," said Süssmann.

Bertin did not need to explain that the crosses indicated the poisonous gases with which shells were filled. "I do him the justice to assume that he was short-sighted," said Bertin soberly.

"Why?" retorted Süssmann. "Surely the Prussian doctrine is that what benefits the Fatherland is pleasing to God. And we Jews had better keep quiet," he went on more seriously. "The Lord of Hosts is just the right God for a war like this." "Yes," said Bertin calmly, "I depart in my wrath, and my shadow falleth towards midnight upon Assur, so that the people crawl into caves and Rezin, King of Syria, laments in his palace of Damascus, and I strike the first-born of Mizraim in the south, and shake my spear and lance, and like the hooves of the wild ass I trample down the seed of Ammon and the walls of

Moab, saith the Lord." "Pleasant sort of God," said Süssmann; "where does that come from?" "Out of my own head," replied Bertin. "But I didn't just invent it." "That comes of going about with poets," replied Süssmann abstractedly. He was following a spider, a large black female spider that had spun its net over a ventilator, and now, irritated by the cigarette smoke, was scurrying back and forth. "Poets . . ." and Bertin pursued his meditations aloud. "Poets? No, men who see things and then write them down. To take the stage as poets we should need all the apparatus of imagination, of invention, and of craftsmanship. Poets are lavish of gods and goddesses, and regard credibility as much more important than truth. But today, in our position, truth is the essential. Think, Süssmann; for nearly four months our company was sweating away at the Steinbergquell park and nothing important happened. On the very first day I went up to the front I met young Kroysing, and he asked for my help. Does that seem credible? Should I dare to put that into a story? And yet it's true, and mark what follows. The very next day the lad is killed; on the day after that I go to see him again to get his letter and forward it and help him out of his mess; and he's already dead, and his battalion gets away with it. But my eyes were opened. And since then I've been pretty active. Poets aren't needed just at present. So long as the effects of this war still shake the world, what his survivors need will be veracious narratives of what took place. Those who don't survive will have done all they humanly could." "And what about me?" bellowed an indignant voice from above. "I've given all I had to give. I've been dead. It was only by a miracle I wasn't knocked out by our own hand-grenades. I think I can call it a day, can't I?" "My dear Süssmann," said Bertin soothingly, "no one expects you to do any more." "Much obliged," snapped the boyish voice through the murky atmosphere. "But that's not what I meant to ask. What I want to know is whether there's any sense and

reason in the whole thing; whether it's worth while. Is the world going to be a better place to live in? Is life going to be a trifle more comfortable than what we've been used to in Prussia? In the Upper Fifth a boy begins to think a bit, and in the Lower Sixth he at least imagines he knows something of what life is going to be like. So what's the point of it? I keep asking myself. How did it start, where does it lead, and who gets anything out of it?"

Bertin lay on his bunk in silent consternation. Surely it was for him to put such questions? But he was dedicated to the present; he had accepted its challenge and in it he must live. He fell to wondering why he had so piously equated what is with what should be. He never used to do so. But now he did. Perhaps he would understand in time to come. "And that's not all," Süßmann continued; "since I told you my story about the explosion, there's a thing or two I can't get out of my head. I dug out that corporal of yours, Schulz, yesterday; and he told me that safety bombs only exploded under certain special conditions, even French bombs. But that was a terrific affair: the floor was split right down to the drains, all the windows smashed, and the shock flung us against the wall. Now—if it wasn't the bombs in the empty cellar, what was it?"

He stopped as though his mind were circling round and round a doubtful point. "No, I'm not just basking in my interesting past. But the French see a good way beyond their noses—how if they had left some concealed mines, so that they could blow their own fort sky-high if need be. And our brave Bavarians touched one off by way of liquid fire and flares and bombs. B-r-r . . ." He shivered, then slid abruptly from his bunk, and his pallid face appeared before Bertin. "I shouldn't care to go through that again. You try taking a promenade on a loaded mine, where some fool might at any moment make the contact and blow you to bits." Bertin sat up, looked into the feverish eyes of the nineteen-year-old lad whose mind was that of man,



and he shuddered. "Sit down here, Süssmann," he said in a reassuring voice. "Suppose it is so. Then you're just as much in danger asleep as awake, you and your comrades up in front, where we shall be crawling very soon. Does that really alter your position? I can't think it does. It's just a degree worse, but a man like you doesn't mind that." "H'm," said Süssmann, looking suspiciously at the floor as though dynamite were hidden beneath the concrete. "It's all very well for you to talk, you're only on a visit."

"No," replied Bertin, "that's not the point. I'm getting a sense of vocation: it's going to be my destiny to tell the tale of your sufferings and your great deeds for future generations to read. It is not mere chance that we met here: you with your story in your head, and the two Kroysings with theirs. More lies will be told about this war than any other international shooting-match. The survivors must tell the truth, and some of those who have a story to tell will survive. Why not you? Why not I? Why not Kroysing? Whether there are mines under that floor or not, Süssmann, you've already done your bit, and death never comes for a man twice." Süssmann grimaced sardonically, then he laughed, and clapped Bertin on the shoulder. "And I thought there weren't any decent rabbis with the army. You're in the wrong job, Bertin." Bertin laughed too. "Yes, my parents would have liked to make me into something of the kind, but I read too many books and acquired too many doubts. A priest of any faith must believe in it as firmly as Father Lochner believes in the cross. And I don't." Süssmann began to breathe more freely. "And you talk of your destiny. You're not much of a sceptic, Reverend Bertin." His tone was almost affectionate. "What a power there is in words."

"I can almost believe that it's worth while for us to sweat our hearts out in this place, and that the lads up in front, whom we're going to see tonight, aren't just fools and madmen."

## CHAPTER V: SIGN, PLEASE

FATHER LOCHNER was still enthroned on the low-backed wooden chair, but the air of genial self-assurance had faded from his face. "Say exactly what it is you want, Herr Lieutenant," he said softly, "and I will do what I can to induce Herr Captain Niggel to agree."

Lieutenant Kroysing picked up a small square sheet of paper, and read: "The undersigned confesses that, to spare the reputation of the third company, and to evade court martial proceedings, in conjunction with the other acting heads of the company, he intentionally and deliberately caused the death of Sergeant Christoph Kroysing. Douaumont, 1916 . . . the day, month, and signature are wanting." Father Lochner stretched out his clasped hands. "Merciful heavens! No man can sign that, it would be suicide." Kroysing shrugged his shoulders. "I will accept nothing less." He blinked. "When this paper, duly signed, is in the possession of Judge-Advocate Mertens at Montmédy, who is in charge of the case against my brother, then I'll stand aside and Herr Niggel and his men may look for quieter quarters, if the interests of the service permit. But until he has signed, Father Lochner, the man will remain in this little mole-heap, though his soul becomes as butter." "But that's blackmail," exclaimed the priest, "barefaced compulsion." Kroysing laughed genially, but there was a wolfish glint in his eyes as he said: "Tit for tat, Father," and there was a ring of satisfaction in his voice. Father Lochner pondered, as though he were alone. "I give in," he sighed at last. "It was not you, Herr Lieutenant, who involved me in this business. It is not your fault that I came here to do my plain duty as a



chaplain, and find myself facing the most hideous abysses in the human soul; and not merely that: I must needs intervene and take sides, since I have to admit that a son of my Church has behaved in this matter like a common murderer; which would have been bad enough had your brother been a man like many others, but this letter proves what a sweet and noble soul the Creator had housed within his body. Such a loss cannot be made good, neither for his parents nor his brother, nor for the nation. So measured, any human vengeance seems grotesque. What he was remains, and what has been done cannot be recalled. You see that, don't you? What then is your purpose?"

Kroysing wrinkled his brow, so deeply tanned beneath the line of his cap, and above it still fair-skinned. "If we start arguing about the futility of punishment in so far as it can never restore what has been destroyed, we shall be led too far afield. Let us view the case quite simply. Captain Niggel has made insinuations against the Kroysings which I want cleared. I think we may put everything else aside." Father Lochner drew a deep breath; it would have puzzled him to say why he had taken so firm a stand for so vile a creature as Niggel, though, as a priest, he quickly reminded himself that this poor warped soul was in more especial need of mercy. "Ah, well," he said in an easier tone, "it is always a question of words that prevents two sensible men from coming to an agreement. Let me draw up a text that will give full satisfaction to your family without ruining Captain Niggel." And he unscrewed his fountain pen and reached out for a bit of paper.

A look from Kroysing restrained his eager hand. "I beg your pardon, Reverend Sir," he purred, "but here I agree with Pontius Pilate when he said: 'What I have written I have written.'" And as the priest withdrew his hand, Kroysing went on: "I am a physicist, an engineer. Captain Niggel started a rotary movement that caught my brother and flung him at a tangent into the void. But the movement did not cease. It will catch Captain Niggel and

fling him also into the void. Or put it this way if you like: a balance has been upset. My brother tipped the scale on the side of good; this weight has been removed, and I shall now redress that balance." Father Lochner shuddered at the young man's savage scorn and flashing eyes. Then he sat up stiff and straight; the inexorable look of the confessor came into those small eyes, shaven cheeks, and outthrust jaw, and the mouth, in the light of the electric lamp, set into a moving line. "Herr Lieutenant," he said, "we are quite alone here. We are no longer talking like two ordinary officers in uniform. What I now say gives me into your hands; no ecclesiastical superior of mine would defend me if you reported to Headquarters that Chaplain Lochner of the Order of St. Francis had said these things to you in conversation. I cannot help it. The malady of our people, their moral malady, can no longer be affected by the fate of Herr Captain Niggel. I was with our Rhinelanders in Belgium when force was put upon neutrality and justice. What I saw, and what our men proudly did, as being the whole duty of a soldier, was murder, robbery, outrage, arson, sacrilege—every crime that can burden the soul of man. They did these things because they were ordered to do them, and they joyfully obeyed because the devil of destruction had possessed himself of men's souls. I have seen the corpses of old men, women, and children; I was there when towns were burned, merely to terrorize a nation weaker than our own into allowing us to march through their country. As a German, I was horror-struck, as a Christian, I wept."

"The civil population shouldn't have fired at the troops," said Kroysing darkly. "What proof was there that they did so?" Father Lochner got up and paced the room from corner to corner. "We said they did, the Belgians denied it. We are the accusers, the accused, and the judges all in one; we allowed no neutral inquiry—all the worse for us. But there is one man in Belgium, one conscience that will not yield, and as a Catholic and a

member of a religious order I am proud of the fact that he is a prince of our most holy Church—Cardinal Mercier. He has most explicitly repudiated the legend about the sharpshooters. And, as a soldier yourself, you must agree when I say that even if Belgian civilians did join in the fighting, which is admitted by no one, our treatment of Belgium was the plainest paganism. Not a war of Christian powers against each other, but a barbarian foray into a Catholic land. How can this end without lasting damage to the soul of Germany? Thousands of innocent men murdered; thousands of houses burned; the inhabitants kicked into the flames and priests hanged in their own church towers. Huddled hordes of peasants massacred by machine-guns, bayonets, and rifle butts. And the flood of lies that we let loose upon the world in our own defence. The brazen face we showed to a world that knew the truth, in an effort to persuade our own poor country that the Belgian atrocities were a fairy-tale. My dear man," he went on, dropping into broad Rhenish, "we have outraged our own soul in a way that only a cultured nation could do. Why trouble about Captain Niggel? We shall be very sick men when we come out of this war. We shall need a cure that is now beyond our imagining. True, the other nations are not in a position to reproach us—the Americans with their Negroes, the English with their Boer war, the Belgians with the Congo, the French with Tongking and Morocco, and the Russians are hardly guiltless. But that does not acquit us, and that is why I beg you to leave this matter confidently to the Lord, and be satisfied that Captain Niggel——"

"—Will sign," broke in the lieutenant harshly. "Listen," he went on, as he filled a large pipe with a capacious brown bowl and curved mouthpiece, "listen, Father Lochner, you have taken upon yourself to say all this because you know the sort of man I am. Your courage does you honour, I like your candour, and I am impressed by your experience. But on the whole I feel sorry for you.



Why? Because you will insist on maintaining a fiction—an important fiction, I admit: that of Christian states and Christian culture. I do not know whether in peacetime we have the right to call our empire Christian; as an engineer, I am at the call of commercial enterprise, entirely dependent on those who have the money to instal machinery and pay workmen, even before the profits begin to roll in; and it is not my business to decide whether Christianity and capitalism can really march arm in arm. It is a fact that they do so, all over the world, and that no priest has yet been driven to suicide on that account. Their resort to poverty, chastity, and obedience changes nothing. That is evasion of the issue, if not something worse. So let us leave peace out of account. But the allegation that this little business of war, which we started two years ago, has anything to do with Christianity, is really more than I can let pass. I know what you are going to say”—and he waved the chaplain’s objection—“you preserve such Christianity as our people have been able to digest; you give them comfort in despair, which is more than anyone else can do for them—the same comfort in the same despair that Private Bertin of the A.S.C. gave my brother when no Christian soul took pity on him—if I may return to our subject. We live in plain and honest pagan times. We kill with every means at our disposal. We’re up to all the tricks of our trade, sir; we use the elements, we exploit the laws of physics and chemistry, we calculate trajectories in the most elaborate parabolas. We make learned investigations into windforces that we may control our poison gas. We have mastered the air that we may rain down bombs upon the earth; as my soul lives, I would hate to die from so cowardly a cause. Well, in half an hour, when we have had something to eat, we’ll both clap a tin pot on our tonsures”—smiling, he leaned his long skull forward and pointed to the thinning hair—“and then take a trip into a world of gaunt reality and European culture. What was that phrase my schoolboy Süssmann,

the fellow who rose from the dead, was quoting the other day: 'Nothing is true and everything is permitted'? Well, that applies to where we're going, and the phrase, 'Love your enemies and bless them that curse you,' has no longer any meaning; that, surely, is a fact. As inevitably as water finds its own level, so the human soul sinks to the deepest point that, as a group, it can reach with impunity. Such, sir, is paganism. And I am an honest pagan. If I survive this war, which is by no means written in the stars, I shall take care that every mother's son within my reach is equally honest. In the struggle between honesty and Christianity in this year of grace, I'm for honesty."

There was fear in Father Lochner's eyes as he looked at Kroysing. He said nothing, picked up the paper from the writing-table, folded it, and walked towards the door. Then he turned. "I wish, Herr Lieutenant, it may be one day my privilege to purge your soul of all this bitterness."

"In half an hour, then," said the pagan Kroysing.

## CHAPTER VI: A PAPER IS RETURNED

AS the last flush of evening in the west paled to a smoky brown, three men and a boy, in steel helmets, stood at the mouth of the southern tunnel, the "throat" of Douaumont, and eyed the ravaged landscape rolling away into the distance in great trough-shaped ravines. Their metal headgear gave them something of the air of medieval warriors, which was exactly as Bertin felt as he stood there, stiff and straight, and thrilling with excitement; he knew that these hours would be unique in his life.

To their left below Hardaumont a pool glittered like a smouldering pile of wood. The expanse of pitted, shattered earth was floating in the violet haze of evening. Towards the south-west a crescent of small violet clouds encircled the field of vision like a wreath of laurel. The three men and the boy surveyed the sky; in the east hung the broad, brazen sickle of the moon, enveloped in a halo; the moon was waxing. The boy—Sergeant Süssmann, the veteran of them all—pointed at it with his thumb. "In three days the moon will change, and the fine weather will be over." Father Lochner, large and imposing in his cloak, said he supposed that portended raids by night. "Worse than that, sir," replied Süssmann, "rain." "It might hold off for another month," growled Eberhard Kroysing behind them; "we haven't nearly finished." "It might, but it won't," said the youth. "The country is very inconsiderate to its conquerors," and he laughed at his own joke.

The four men, so diverse in rank and military experience, strode slowly down the slope; their eyes, now accustomed to the falling dusk, could make out the narrow winding



paths. Each carried a stick; Bertin and Süssmann had hooked back the skirts of their overcoats, the two officers wrapped their cloaks closely round them. There was already a damp chill in the air, and the night would be colder still. Süssmann, who knew this part as well as his way to school in Berlin, walked ahead. Behind him, alert and eager, walked Bertin; Lieutenant Kroysing and the priest brought up the rear. "That was once a trench," observed Süssmann, as they changed direction and made for a dark smudge upon the landscape that was called Douaumont village, once a group of neat houses and a little church, and now an indistinguishable heap of ravaged earth. Moreover, that earth was beginning to smell; first the sickly odour of decay, and then the scorched, sulphurous reek of poisoned earth. Süssmann, in his level boyish voice, called out: "Wire!" under which they had to duck; indeed the whole hillside up to the fort was thick with it. He also interpreted the smells; corpses buried too near the surface, stale excrement not properly dug in, gas-shells with which the soil had been riddled thereabouts, and piles of putrefying tinned foods.

He explained to Bertin that the stench was worse on days of sun and wind, when the whirling dust brought out all the manifold reek of that rotting, viscous soil that extended for about two and a half kilometres to the French lines, and thence as far again to the inner girdle of Verdun forts. The way, he explained, cut diagonally across the great rampart known as the Adalbert line; thence forward they would have to be more careful; the almost obliterated road ran blade-straight between the villages of Fleury and Douaumont up to the front line, as tempting for the French field artillery as it was for their all too frequent victims; relief troops, stretcher-bearers, orderlies, and all that walked on two legs. At the moment, a sinister silence reigned, except for hordes of rats that dashed out indignantly as they approached; in the barbed wire on either side of them scraps of stuff and paper

fluttered in the wind. At one point, just before they left the trenched road and took another turn, a shapeless, black mass was hanging in the wire. Just beyond that corner they fell in with a couple of soldiers, panting and exhausted; guides who were trotting up to Douaumont to bring down the relieving battalion. The deathly stillness had made the troops so nervous that they arrived half an hour before their time. Bertin suddenly realized that these trenches were now full of men; the small protuberances he had noticed must be steel helmets.

After thirty yards or so they jumped down into a traverse. To the right of them stood a rigid figure peering southwards. The tenseness of his attitude struck the new arrivals with a sort of shock. They began to breathe more heavily, and felt sorely tempted to sit down with their backs against the cool earth. Must they climb down into those wreathing mists? Süssmann and Bertin were half a minute ahead of the other two; the mist was rising from the Meuse, Süssmann explained, and had resulted in a gas alarm—better one too many than too few. To the left lay Thiaumont farm, and further forward the Thiaumont line, a dark ridge aligned against the night sky. The trench was thinly held; and Bertin suddenly realized the incessant strain in which those few officers and N.C.O.'s must live. In these trenches was none of that sense of security that still lightened their daily labours in Douaumont. His mood of exaltation faded; for the first time since his boyhood he sensed hostility in the air.

He had seen many things; he was familiar with the implements of war; dead men, exploding shells, and aircraft bombs were nothing new to him; moreover, he had read and listened to war bulletins for two years. The idea of war was to him as much a matter of course as his own uniform. But he himself was innocent of enmity; he did not hate the French nor want them destroyed; his vision of the war had always been lacking in intensity and life. Now he felt it physically, and the burden of it lay like a



weight above his heart. Hordes of men were on the watch, peering through the night waiting for an opportunity to strike; yonder, wearing a rather shallower steel helmet, the French soldier crouched against the trench wall, gazing northwards, and ready to shoot him, Bertin, down as he approached. Yonder, in the void, as here, an Order went forth for the gathering up of shock troops, which were then flung against the line, men not anxious to be killed, but, who, when the Order bade them, leapt out to stab and shoot their enemy. And Bertin reflected bitterly how these men of 1916 had, in the spring of 1914, met these same Frenchmen and Belgians and English in peaceful sporting encounters and learned gatherings; and how they had thrilled with pride and pleasure when German firemen hurried across the frontier to help in a mine disaster, or French rescue parties appeared on German soil. They were murder parties now. What shameful enchantment had bewitched the world?

Eberhard Kroysing and Father Locher came round the corner. "Come along," said Kroysing nervously. "I'm sure there's something up tonight." Little Süssmann sniffed the air like a hunting-dog. "Not here," he said confidently, clambered to the top of the trench, and walked beside the line of wire, guiding Bertin through the narrow gaps that threaded the zigzagging steel network. "It's new wire, and there's plenty of it," he said. "An A.S.C. job," he added, in a sort of compliment to Bertin. There was a ridge of high ground on their left; they stopped for a moment in a gully, then hurried through a waste of shell-holes, avoiding the broad road, which, wrecked though it was, still showed up clearly in the darkness. Suddenly the path swung round; before them, white in the distance, flares shot up into the sky or hovered in milky radiance against the blackness. From time to time they noticed sections of telephone line beside them, but the trampled path kept on turning and twisting though it led steadily downhill and southwards. And all the way they walked

by walls of earth—trench-walls sometimes waist-high, and sometimes reaching to their heads. And from time to time, with the suddenness of an electric discharge, rifle shots rang out, as sharp and savage as the crack of whips, and bursts of machine-gun fire. Bertin was staring across the valley at the chains of red flashes, when a fist on his helmet pushed him down against a mound of earth. With a whistle like the scurry of a multitude of rats something hurtled over his head and crashed, spattering all four of them with loose soil. "That's a dud," said Süssmann at his side. "There's many a man been croaked by a dud," growled a voice from a neighbouring shell-hole. Bertin and Süssmann heard an excited whispering near by, though they could not distinguish what was said, as the ghastly thudding of the machine-guns went on incessantly—the German guns this time.

"Herr Lieutenant, I must stop," groaned Father Lochner close to Kroysing's ear. "You can't do that," said Kroysing; "you are right in the shrapnel zone." "But I can't go on," gasped the other, "my legs have given out." "Nonsense," said Kroysing, "it's just a touch of nerves; a spot of this will put you right." And he handed him his flask, which gave forth a fragrance of brandy as he uncorked it. "There, help yourself," he added in a calm and soothing voice, faintly touched with mockery; "Only healthy men have put their lips to that bottle." With quivering hands the priest grasped the felt cover of the flask, raised it to his lips, and swallowed twice, three times; a thrill of warmth ran down into his stomach. "You'll be all right in a minute," said Kroysing, hooking the flask on to his belt once more; "I ought to have given you a tot before." Then he noticed the priest fumbling under his cloak; with one hand Father Lochner grasped his silver cross, in the other he produced a folded white paper. "You'd better keep that paper," said the priest; "it would be dangerous if your enemy got hold of it." Kroysing swung round and stared at the priest, and his face, framed in the

steel rims of his helmet, looked very grim. "Damnation," he said, grabbed the paper, and slipped it into his leather legging. "Thank you. It really might have suggested blackmail. But you will do it by word of mouth, won't you, sir?" "If we get back safe," replied Lochner, now more calm, and added: "Brandy is a gift of God." Kroysing, still disconcerted by his carelessness, growled genially that three things were needed to carry on a war; drink, tobacco, and men. Then he leaned his long form over the pitted slope; it had indeed been a dud. Gratitude was a grand virtue, thought he. To think that he should have let that bit of paper out of his hands! With that paper in his hands Niggel could have proved as clear as daylight that he had got him shifted to Douaumont from motives of personal revenge, and had put pressure on him to sign a lying declaration. . . . And he wiped the sweat from his brow. "All right again?" he asked the chaplain. The others drew a deep breath. "Quite." "Then let's get on."

They crawled downwards for the last thousand yards, edging into cover all the way. When the white flares shot up, they stopped, unless they were sheltered at the moment by an extra deep section of trench. The path, narrow and circuitous, shot away in places, deepened or buried by shell-holes, led onwards, through traverses, gigantic mole-heaps, and shattered galleries, in which black holes indicated the mouths of dugouts. At last, soaked in sweat, they saw, against a line of upturned earth, the backs of soldiers, almost boys, and the curves of German steel helmets. And suddenly they noticed a machine-gun beside them. At an angle to the trench, smoking a pipe, sat a bearded sapper sergeant, who had been expecting them. "Right on time, sir," he said, grinning. "All O.K. here. The battalion is as good as fixed up; the officers are expecting you in the big dugout." He spoke in an undertone, and with a certain familiarity to which Lieutenant Kroysing, as it seemed, was accustomed. Then he



frowned anxiously. "There seems to be a lot going on next door. Franz is keeping bloody quiet. I expect he's listening for the noise of the relief, and the new lot aren't in yet." "Then we'll have to pull his leg a bit," answered Kroysing. "Look here, sir," he added, turning to the priest, "you'd best go and lie down; there'll be room in the next hospital dugout, and I'll come and collect you later on." He disappeared with one guide, and Lochner with another.

Bertin followed Süssmann through the deep and narrow cutting, above which hung a section of the Milky Way, like a twin flack of powdery smoke. Infantrymen pushed past them, crept out of dugouts, and vanished into others. At one point men were at work with spades, widening the passage, which, a little further on, enclosed a large shell-hole. The work was done in silence and, as far as possible, without a sound. In the former shell-hole stood a squat gun-barrel on a mounting, the like of which Bertin had never seen before; and near by was the entrance of a newly dug gallery that led obliquely downwards. They sat down on a pile of large shells in two-handled wicker containers; these, it was explained, were the light mines. "If these are the light ones," said Bertin, "I'd like to see the heavy ones." A screen of wire and branches, covered with earth, protected the mine-throwers from air observation. Hot coffee was handed up from the dugout; Süssmann suggested they should go inside; Bertin said he would rather stay where he was. The chill, damp earth, the reek from the dugout, nauseated him. He eyed with horror the small gaunt Saxons at their posts; they looked so haggard, and there were so few of them. This was the front line, the grey wall of heroes that guarded Germany's conquests; how long could it endure? As he sipped his steaming coffee, he said to Süssmann: "Would these dugouts stand a bombardment?" Süssmann merely laughed. "Safe against splinters, but no more. At a pinch they might stand one seven-point-five; but ten seven-point-fives would burst

them up. And when the rain comes, they'll be flooded, and"—pointing to the moon shining dully, a pallid halo of haze—"rain is as certain as the soldiers' pay." The battalion, which had just received fresh drafts and now numbered rather more than seven hundred men, possessed twelve light machine-guns and two heavy ones, and was holding a sector twice as large as it had done a month before. The French kept on putting fresh divisions into their front line, and withdrawing them after a short time for a rest that really was a rest; the men were properly fed, and their nerves were not ruined by lack of fat, bad jam, and mouldy bread. These four mine-throwers were to replace two batteries taken out of the line. The stage was set for peace, that was clear enough; but of peace there seemed no prospect. Men in helmets or caps kept hurrying past them, stumbling and cursing under their breath. Menace, like a cloud of darkness, seemed to roll out from beyond the ridged trenches and the ravaged earth, a menace palpable to all. Two hundred yards is no distance for a rifle bullet; attacking infantry can cover it in five minutes; shells spanned it in a flash. "This is war at last," said Bertin to himself; "now you have it. You are clinging to its outer edge, like a fly in glue; your heart and lungs are throbbing; and yet the enemy still makes no move."

A soft light from above flung dark shadows into the trenches; had they failed to hear the rockets? There was certainly something brewing. His hands and knees quivered with the prevailing tension. He began to clamber up the bay in the trench-wall. Süssmann whispered to him not to be a fool. With night-glasses the French could see his face as a light patch against the black earth. There was no danger in this sector, but while the next battalion was being relieved, Franz might very well make trouble before the new-comers had time to settle down. Suddenly, and Bertin's heart seemed to stop, a machine-gun just behind them burst into a spattering, malignant volley; he could not see the flashes. Three, four other guns joined

in. Not far away rockets screamed upwards and dropped their balls of light, shedding sinister red reflections on the faces of the crouching men. Then—a hurtling roar above their heads, and a crash far away in front. “Barrage,” shouted Süssmann into Bertin’s ear. “All eyewash; just to fool Franz.” The huddled attitude of their two Saxon neighbours revealed to Bertin that they too were afraid—the guns often fired short. Would the French reply? Would the diversion succeed? It did succeed. The line ahead and either side of them began to flicker and roar, and the sky was lit with flashes. From the dugout came some men in artillery caps with a direction finder; crouching behind the screen of wire and branches, they took their bearings by the gun-flashes from the French batteries, shouting figures in each other’s ears. The uproar in the starlit night, the explosions, the bursts of flame, the scream of hurtling shells—how long would it endure?

Bertin could bear it no more; to him, the repulsive dugout now seemed a refuge; he stumbled down some steps, pushed aside a tarpaulin, and saw, by the dim illumination of a stearine cartridge, their weapons ready to their hand. The air was thick and smoke-laden. The faces of the sappers, the gunners, and the Saxon riflemen made him feel almost ill. Hitherto he had seen them against a background of glorious illusion; but here no illusion could survive. Here, in this clay and boarded tomb, were men for whom all hope had ended, throw-outs from the world markets now glutted with human material. Here, crouching on a plank beneath the earth, two hundred yards away from the enemy, he realized, yawning with sudden weariness, that here too men were doing no more than the work demanded of them. The earth above them rocked and thundered; the walls began to crumble; dust poured from between the timber planking; and while the infantrymen calmly went on smoking their cigarettes, he wondered vaguely how he had come to realize this truth. An agonizing truth that stripped him of the strength he



needed to endure—surely life in his company could not be typical of the army. He must certainly tell Kroysing all about it. Could that be Kroysing at the door? It was indeed—young Kroysing, in his sergeant's cap, and smiling genially. Yes, life was very gay in the cellars of Cham-brettes farm. The sausage machines were in full swing, turning out sausages and gut for sausage skins, and on the door hung the new regulation about the use of human flesh, grey-skinned human flesh. . . .

With a smile of kindly amusement Sergeant Süssmann looked down at the face of Bertin, private in the A.S.C., apoplectically asleep, his helmet tipping off his head. Süssmann picked it up, dangled it to and fro, and came to the conclusion that the lad had stood his test.

“The relief of the battalion was concluded, an hour and a half in advance of time; nothing to report.”

## CHAPTER VII: THE GIFT

ABOUT eleven, in the darkness, Süssmann awakened Bertin; the candle had burnt out. He was dreaming at the moment of a violent thunderstorm on the Ammersee; the lightning seemed to lash the waters into frenzy and the thunder echoed from the mountain walls. "Up you get, my lad," said Süssmann. "There's a swell firework display on; don't you miss it." Bertin at once realized where he was; his head ached, but that would pass in the open air. Outside, the trench was packed with men, all peering behind them. An organ roar of thunder, many-voiced, filled the night, but from the next sector came a burst of flashes, methodically scattering a fiery downpour over the approaches and all the familiar heights and hollows of that land. Where the shells dropped, earth and fiery gases shot up in cloud-like pillars. The hiss and scream of the hurtling missiles, all the hellish, overmastering uproar of the bombardment, made Bertin's heart quiver, while, in that same moment, he clutched Süssmann's arm in ecstasy, exalted by the fury of the human impulse to destruction—the joy of omnipotence in evil.

A Saxon sergeant, bespectacled and gaunt, surprised Bertin by observing calmly: "A pretty good show, eh?" Bertin looked at the bristly face beneath the helmet, the narrow cheek-bones, the keen eyes, and the two ribbons, black and white, and green and white, in the top button-hole of his tunic; a surge of pride and admiration swept over him for these his comrades, German soldiers, their loyalty, their hopelessness, and their dogged courage; mortal men could endure no more than they had done. Fortunately the first battalion got off lightly. "It'll all



be over in ten minutes," shouted Süssmann at his ear. Then, as Bertin knew, the German artillery would take up the tale; from the squared accounts of battle new destruction would be born, and a fresh day of counter-creation would begin. In the meantime the young Saxon casually lit his pipe, and a couple of others shared his lighter. The uproar gradually died down, and men could hear each other speak. Only above the Adalbert line shrapnel was still bursting. Those were the long tens, observed the Saxon; they had obviously just got up a fresh supply of ammunition and wanted to get rid of it. "Naturally," agreed his neighbour, "otherwise they'd have to carry it all home again, if peace breaks out to-night."

The young sergeant waved this suggestion aside. "You may make up your mind to pour out a good few pots of coffee before then. There's too much doing in the Iron Cross trade for peace to be allowed to break out yet." "There's more to it than that," said his neighbour. Bertin pricked up his ears; these fellows were talking like Pahl, like Lebede the innkeeper, Halezinsky the gas worker, and young Vehse from Hamburg. In the pale darkness that now reigned once more the faces framed by the sharp rims of the helmets glimmered like masks. The men on duty now peered ahead once more, and the others drifted back into the dugouts. The bespectacled Saxon had just expressed his astonishment at Bertin's cap, and he now added: "What kind of people have Süssmann and his lieutenant brought up to the front line?" when Father Lochner's massive shoulders, topped by Kroysing's tall form, came into view. Süssmann kicked the Saxon on the shin, and the other promptly understood. "Well, I'm a student of theology myself, and I've never been outside of Halle in my life." "Ah, a colleague?" said the chaplain innocently. "Yes, Herr Pastor!" said the sergeant, saluting stiffly. Süssmann suppressed a grin; as from one theologian to another the reply seemed so incongruous. Father Lochner noticed nothing. He felt kindly to the young

man. "The Lord God protect you." And he was about to move on—but the youthful theologian replied politely: "Yes, I fancy He will; we're safe for the moment. People like us get killed on the day before the armistice." Lochner looked, said nothing, and went on. The Saxons nudged each other. As Kroysing followed, he said in his companion's ear: "Well, I expect you've realized what the men are like. Shall we go along home?" "Just ten minutes and a brandy," begged the priest. Kroysing gladly agreed. "When will you speak to Herr Niggel?" he asked casually, unhooking his flask. An appealing look came into Lochner's face. "Tomorrow morning," he promised, "before I go back." Kroysing's head revolved on its long neck like a lighthouse—he was looking for Bertin. "I must collect my chicks," he explained. Sergeant Süssmann pointed with his thumbs. "He's studying No Man's Land."

Bertin had thrust his face into a gap in the screen above a mine-thrower; with hands hollowed round his eyes he peered into the night, where the wire entanglements glittered palely in the darkness; the flashes of the explosions dazzled him no longer. German shells were now bursting far away on the right. Confronting him lay something formless and dark, fascinating, strange, and ominous. And he remembered a morning when as a schoolboy in the Lower Fourth he had gone out on an expedition to that Drei-Kaiser-Ecke where, behind the town of Myslowitz, the realm of the German Emperor marched with those of the Austrian Emperor and the Tsar. A little stream, the Przemsza, wound its green waters between them. There was nothing to mark one bank from the other; flat green land, a railway bridge, a sandy road, and forest in the distance. Except that the uniform of the Frontier Cossacks differed from that of the German Customs Guards. And yet the young schoolboy on the hither side of the stream had been aware of something strange, ominous, and fascinating, a foreign

land, where the speech was unintelligible, manners and customs different, the people uneducated, and possibly dangerous. Frontiers, thought Bertin, frontiers. What tales they had been told. What was it that sensible Saxon had said while the French were shooting: "A pretty good show, eh?" Quite impersonal; that was the whole point. A German had held his cooking-pot to a Frenchman's thirsty lips—and rightly so. And then—this! Where—where was the truth?

Kroysing eyed his protégé with approval. He had brought him, among other reasons, to study his behaviour at the edge of the abyss. And there was no doubt; he had stood the test. Let him once get back into his mouldy company and Kroysing's suggestion would come like a message from heaven. "Why are you shaking your head, Bertin?" he asked, from behind the other's back. "I can see nothing," said Bertin, clambering cautiously down. "Your reason should have told you that." "Men don't always act according to reason." "Is that so?" said Kroysing. "And now I think we might go back and get some sleep."

The moonlit land was cloven with dark shadows. Bertin, refreshed by his sleep, thirstily breathed the air that grew cooler as they struggled on; the reek of explosive no longer reached them; it was blown down to the river by the night breeze. After half an hour of silent walking Kroysing tapped Bertin on the shoulder and drew him a little aside. "We may not meet in the morning," he said. "You'll be sleeping with Süssmann and turning out early. You saw what pleasant surprises Franz had waiting for us here. Nothing happened last night, but tomorrow something may. So I want you to do one more service for me in this little family affair. In my desk there are some of my brother's belongings and some papers that must be sent on to Judge-Advocate Mertens as soon as a certain person has signed a certain little document. If anything happens to me, I count on your help. O.K.?" he asked earnestly.



And Bertin answered, after a moment's thought: "O.K." "Right," said Kroysing. "It only remains for me to carry out one of my brother's last wishes, and present you with his fountain-pen." And Kroysing's large hand held out a small black cylinder. Bertin recoiled; from beneath the rim of his helmet he peered timidly at Kroysing's eyes, his stern set face, deep-shadowed in the dim light. "I would rather not," he said softly; "it belongs to your parents." "It belongs to you," insisted Kroysing calmly; "I am carrying out the provisions of a will." Bertin took the gift doubtfully and eyed it, concealing his superstitious feelings. "I hope it will serve you longer than it did my young brother and remind you of the gratitude of the Kroysing family as often as you put it to paper. It ought to come in useful to a writer."

Bertin stammered out some words of thanks. He felt the unfamiliar pressure of the hard long object in the breast pocket of his tunic; the Kroysings held him fast.



**BOOK FIVE**  
**IN THE MIST**





## CHAPTER I: OCTOBER

THE earth lay like a rusty vessel topped by a tin sky, from which rain had been falling for a month.

About October 20, four A.S.C. men were trudging wearily up from Moirey station. They and Knappe, the senior corporal, had been engaged in the tedious task of loading powder charges into a goods truck, and now their work was done. All were aching for a cigarette or a pipe, but in vain. Their pay was not due until the afternoon of the next day but one, when each man received his ration of tobacco for the next ten days. Until then they helped each other out as best they could. Bertin, for instance, promised each of the others one of his remaining three cigarettes; he could not smoke cigarettes as the paper irritated his sensitive throat. Shivering and depressed, the four men tramped along the highroad back to the artillery park. The road was covered with a thick layer of whitish slime, which stuck to their boots and made heavy going. The men wore tarpaulins wrapped round their shoulders like short hooded cloaks, and were thus pretty well protected from without; but they had a day's work in Fosses wood behind them and the stiff canvas was already soaked. And the drill jackets they wore underneath were already wet; only their tunics were still dry, and if it grew colder, there was yet another protective layer they could assume—their overcoats. Four very diverse men had volunteered to help the corporal: Lebede, the wily innkeeper, had hoped to wangle some tobacco from the railway men; Przygulla, the farmhand, because he was Lebede's faithful henchman; kindly little Otto Reinhold, because he would not desert his fellow-skat-players, and Werner Bertin, for



reasons that were closely connected with his visit to the front-line trenches.

Knappe, the senior corporal, was one of those gaunt, hollow-cheeked men, with a straggling growth of fair beard round their chins, utterly conscientious and reliable, who, with all the appearance of consumptives, usually manage to survive to the age of eighty. Lebede, the inn-keeper, was a well-known figure. Until his death by the bullets of the Reichswehr during the desperate workers' uprising of 1919 in the Holzmarkstrasse-Jannowitzbrücke district in Berlin, he was a man who contrived, by persistence and persuasion, to get his way in all matters that he had at heart. Przygulla, the farmhand, a neglected child of a family of nine or ten, would have developed into a rather more intelligent citizen if certain growths at the back of his nose had been removed at the proper time. And so, as he breathed with difficulty, his thick lips were always half open, which gave him an imbecile expression. Last of all, Otto Reinhold was the very pattern of geniality, and his friendly face, his rather toothless mouth, and his blue eyes gave him a somewhat old-maidish air, but for the little carefully trimmed moustache that marked his manhood. He was a much respected master-plumber from the Turmstrasse in Berlin-Moabit.

Private Bertin had greatly changed, in the general opinion, since he had been "up in front." He could not forget the Saxons' haggard faces, their worn skins and sleepless eyes; he could not forget that it had been raining in those trenches for a month past, that the men hardly ever got a hot meal, and that their hands and clothes and boots were permanently coated with slime. Their dugouts were packed, and every step they took was over sticky, slippery clay. All the shell-holes were flooded pools, the roads and paths and traverses had long since become impassable. For all these reasons Bertin had volunteered to work over-hours. He had explained his view to his comrade Pahl, who had told him he was a fool for his

pains—the lads in front had better reflect on the causes and consequences of their condition. For the rest, these four men were hungry, they were tired, they wished they had something to smoke, and were longing to take off their wet clothes by a warm stove. The time was between four and five o'clock; the early dusk was falling through the watery air. At the moment it was not raining, but rain it certainly would before evening. . . .

At the end of the road, along which those French prisoners had marched so many months before, a car suddenly appeared. It approached rapidly and, obedient to the regulations, without lights. Karl Lebede, with his hand under the peak of his cap, eyed the speeding car. "Hi!" he said to Przygulla, the farmhand, "isn't there a bit of stuff over that fellow's headlight?" Meantime the "fellow" had come a good deal nearer, and the bit of stuff revealed itself as a square pennant, half black and half white, and edged with red. A huge yellowish grey touring-car hurtled towards them, with two officers in the back seat. "Line up, you chaps," shouted Przygulla, the farmhand, in alarm; "it's the Crown Prince!"

The prescribed salute for members of the Imperial Family was for the rank and file to plant themselves motionless by the roadside and follow the passing car with their eyes. And these four weary men did so; they stepped into the mud and stood with their hands against their trouser seams, awaiting the inevitable mud-splashes. The driver, probably a common soldier himself, could not venture to slow down so as to spare four Landsturm men in grey oil-cloth caps the hour they would have to spend in scraping off the mud. Splash! the car roared past. But then something remarkable happened; for as one slim officer with his chin in a fur collar raised a glove towards his cap, the other leaned sideways and threw something out of the car, something that, because of the speed at which they were travelling, landed behind them. The car dwindled into the distance; it was all over.

Not quite over. In the muddy road lay four small square paper packets—doubtless cigarettes, which the exalted personage carried about with him to distribute to the men, and which his adjutant had just bestowed. Still quite taken aback, and digesting the experience, the four men now stood in the middle of the road. What was the Crown Prince doing here? What business had he at the front? It was said that he showed a kindly interest in his troops; none the less, the army shrugged their shoulders over him because it was only too well known how little the fact of the Verdun battle was allowed to interrupt the lordly tenor of his life; he played with his greyhounds, with pretty Frenchwomen or nurses or tennis partners, while for the past seven months all the tribes of Germany had poured out blood for him. But here he was, scattering cigarettes as he drove by, and they would be wet and spoilt if not speedily picked up. Otto Reinhold, prepared to dirty his fingers for all four, had already bent down with a grunt of satisfaction.

But someone seized him by the wrist. "Let them lie," said Lebede, the innkeeper, in a harsh undertone; "they're not for us. Anyone who wants to give us a present will please give it properly." Startled and ashamed, Reinhold looked into Karl Lebede's fleshy, freckled countenance, his set lips and angry eyes. And stepping forward Lebede stamped the nearest packet into a pulp; then he continued on his way up the steps that led past the water troughs to the hutments. Bertin and Przygulla, the farmhand, followed him without a word, and that kindly little man, Otto Reinhold, followed too, with a regretful sigh. And three lonely packets were left shining in the mud: thirty cigarettes.

Well, said Bertin to himself, who would have thought it of Lebede? Here was a stout fellow. Not one had grumbled, each of these four had acquiesced. Possibly Przygulla or Reinhold might slip out of the hut later on. . . . As he made his way up the steps, Private



Bertin caught himself wondering what he would have done but for Karl Lebede. He had laughed in philosophic superiority when the cigarettes dropped out of the car; moreover, he did not care for cigarettes. But he was candid enough to admit that he would certainly have picked them up to prevent them being wasted. And the Crown Prince passed on. . . . Well, it was an odd incident. He had no doubt unloaded a few score Iron Crosses up in the front line, and was now hurrying back to Charleville, all unsuspecting that Lebede, the innkeeper, had given judgment against him.

The Crown Prince drove on through the falling dusk. His lips were set; he was deeply dissatisfied with circumstances for being stronger than himself, and with himself for being weaker than the circumstances. He had not indeed been distributing decorations. He had driven to the front to make clear that he had once again been right though he had not carried his point, that he had been outvoted, and that once again he had not had the nerve to stand up to the All Highest, stop the bus, and get out. It was an alluringly comfortable bus, admirably upholstered and providing every comfort. But it was of little service to him if wrong decisions were taken in his name, decisions which would, in the last resort, be entered up against him in history. Two days ago the generals had met at Pierrepont, on the line from Longuyon to Metz, under the chairmanship of the Kaiser, together with representatives of the new Supreme Army Command that had acquired control since the end of August. The disquieting situation before Verdun was the subject of discussion; what was to be done? The deliberations were conducted with refreshing candour; he, Frederick William, German Crown Prince, and Colonel-General in the Prussian army, listened to a statement of his most secret convictions, a summary of his complaints and grievances; the primary and fundamental error of attacking on too

narrow a front, and the failure to send promised reinforcements, when the troops engaged in the first thrust had not been adequate. It was because an attack had not been launched with doubled strength on both sides of the Meuse simultaneously that many a mother's son had sunk into a nameless grave in vain. Moreover, the resistance of the French had been underestimated; they gave ground, but they went on fighting all the time, so that the exhausted reserves could get no further than Douaumont. Then, suddenly, enough troops were hurried up to secure an advance of a few hundred yards here and there at the cost of fearful losses; and this had not prevented the French from preparing and launching their attack on the Somme. The alternatives were clear; to admit bankruptcy before Verdun, and save the life and health of tens of thousands of the youth of Germany; or to preserve the façade, the appearance of success, to prolong their sufferings, and fill the hospitals with sick and wounded.

The Prince leaned back and closed his eyes. He could see, strangely intermingled, the grizzled generals' heads and the boyish faces of the infantrymen. The pulsations of his heart seemed to bring them alternately into the foreground of his vision. The rain had started only a month ago, but the casualty list from disease already often amounted to thirty per cent of the rifles, and often to more. The men went down with chills and fevers and had to be sent back to the rear for proper treatment. It was the condition of the front line that caused all the trouble. It had come into existence as a result of the savage fighting that followed the days of July; it had not been selected and prepared against the hardships of winter. It was not a good attacking-base for future attacks, nor was it suitable for defence in case the French advanced between Tavanne and the Poivre heights; it was overlooked by the enemy, badly damaged, and engulfed in mud; the artillery was hopelessly bogged except where it was served by narrow-

gauge railways, and it had become impossible to bring up material and ammunition by any other means. He had heartily agreed when some of those present urged that the line should be shifted further back, that the ground won during the last few months should be abandoned, that positions should be prepared on the Hardaumont-Douaumont-Poivre heights, and that during one night the front should be "shortened," and the whole quagmire handed over with our blessings to the French.

The Prince shivered. He pulled the fur rug closer around his slim legs and rubbed his fur-jacketed shoulders nervously against the cushions. From his nostrils to the corners of his mouth there were twin lines that gave his profile a certain resemblance to that of his forebear, Old Fritz. Unfortunately, such a half-measure would not cure the trouble. The Group Command of East-Meuse had sent its most capable officers, and they made it clear that the main difficulties—the extended communications, the impossibility of bringing up reserves, supplies, and ammunition—would not thereby be removed. The French were much too astute to let themselves be drawn into that quagmire—so that the position on the heights would not serve as a vantage-point for further movements. No, they must face the facts and evacuate all the ground that they had so laboriously won, withdrawing almost to the point from which they had attacked in February; not even Fosses wood and Height 344 could be held. All this was good sense, but the proposal was impossible. The events of the year 1916 had been such that the prestige of the House of Hohenzollern could not support such a retreat; the Somme battle was bad; the Eastern front in Brusilov's grip was worse; the Austrians were in trouble as usual (they had come to a halt in the Adige valley, in the Bukovina entire regiments had deserted, the Czechs would fight no more for Habsburg). One had merely to recall the year 1908, the annexation of Bosnia by Ahrenthal, to realize that the whole war had begun



as an affair of Habsburg internal politics. And now the Rumanians had come in—fifteen army corps—no trifling matter. The outlook for Germany was dark indeed. And added to all this, a retreat here in the West? Impossible! The German soldier had begun to lose faith, and to see the ruling class, in which he still blindly trusted, in a rather diminished light, while at home in Germany there had been incidents—the end of which no man could foresee. Germany was about to face her worst winter, the bread ration would have to be reduced to half a pound, and even the soldiers would now have to go short. It was morale alone that sustained the nation, their faith in the Imperial House, in the undefeated army, and in the certainty of final victory. If it were admitted that the battle of Verdun had been fought in vain, then Karl Liebknecht would be proclaimed a prophet, the Reichstag majority would rise up in its wrath and unmask the Ruling House and the army command, and some sort of account would have to be given for all this “senseless outpouring of blood.” Must this happen? It must not. Was it avoidable? It was avoidable, if we did not lose our heads, left matters as they were, and, with a heavy heart indeed, called upon the German soldier to bear this burden also. He would bear it; he would gladly die for the Fatherland; he would stand without a murmur in mud all the winter through and keep guard against the hereditary foe. Only—there must be no hint of weakness, no false humanity. The German needed to be led; he loved the strong hand; then he would fetch the stars out of the sky.

The Crown Prince could see the wrinkled face of the old Junker who said this with such conviction, his little eyes, and hear his rasping voice, and he smiled to himself. Others had objected, von Lychow, for instance, who had for some time been in command on the left bank of the Meuse; but what such men said carried little weight. It was common sense, but common sense does not fetch

the stars out of the sky. He, the Prince, had watched his father while the generals were at odds; the Supreme War-Lord. Papa understood very well how to present an imposing appearance, to play the part of a monarch presiding at a council of war, and flash an eagle eye at appropriate moments. But he, the son, was not deceived. The face was flabby, there were wrinkles round the eyes, and it was with an effort that he maintained that confident imperial mien. The son knew what only sons can guess: his brave Papa had conceived of the war as something wholly different when he launched it with so much gusto. More after the pattern of his manœuvres, probably? Ah, but war does not work out according to plan, Your Majesty. He had at first thought he would be his own general staff in wartime, but that was a gallant dream of the piping days of peace. He had had to send poor old Moltke out into the desert, and after him that agreeable fellow Falkenhayn, and summon two new gods whom he could not stand. Half-measures, always half-measures. If at last they took no account of the so-called neutrals, and issued orders to the U-boats, to sink on sight whatever came within range, the ships that provisioned England and supplied France with American shells—the war would be over in six months. Then the Americans and their fatuous President might protest, they might even send over their wretched army; it would be welcome. Fodder for German field howitzers, that was all.

The car was going well, a faultless engine and springs of first-rate German steel. When the Rumanian interlude was over, Papa would risk an overture for peace, to stop the Pope's mouth. That could do no harm, in any case, for Belgium, of course, would remain in German hands, and the ore deposits of Longwy and Briey. Taking a large view and a careful survey of the map, the whole Verdun offensive was no more than the strategic safeguard of these conquests at the coming peace. This was not, of course, a matter to be revealed to everyone, not



even to the deputies who so often favoured General Headquarters with their annexation memoranda. Purely military considerations, of course, determined military decisions. For that reason, too, poor Falkenhayn had invented the famous "battle of attrition" when the first assault on the fortress failed, and little remained of the glory of the Verdun adventure. From the military point of view Verdun was a fortress like any other, behind which the French, based on Châlons, had prepared a fresh line of defence. But politically, for Germany's future, and for her industry, Verdun was unique and irreplaceable. And so—the Heir Apparent sighed—they must stay in the old positions all the winter through.

It was now completely dark. Behind a sweeping glare of headlights the car sped through the night towards a glimmer on the horizon that was called Charleville, where there would be warm and comfortable rooms and an excellent dinner. His meditations had warmed the Prince. He felt cheerful and in good humour. He turned slyly to his adjutant, who had obviously been enjoying a short nap. "We ought to have gone a bit out of our way and looked in at the Dannevoux Field Ambulance for a cup of coffee with Sister Kläre, eh?" The other, with the prompt alertness of the soldier, agreed that that would have been much more agreeable than dashing through a stormy night like Goethe's *Erlkönig*. "But we might just as well have stayed at home, Your Highness. Retreat or not—it will make no difference. The Tommies sing: 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' and our field-greys: 'For this campaign, Isn't an express train, So wipe your tears away, With sandpaper.' Nations have broad backs."

What was to happen, within the very next few days, had long been determined. It was settled by four homely-looking Frenchmen, who were also experienced soldiers. Until the morning of the twenty-fourth the French guns fired as usual. Then followed a drum-fire from six hundred

gun-barrels, a wall of steel, explosion, and destruction, hurtling down upon the enemy lines. Then a sudden cessation, as though the infantry attack were now at last imminent, and eight hundred German guns, more than two hundred batteries, burst into a storm of fire to throttle the supposed attack. That had been anticipated. They had long since been marked down on the French artillery maps, and now their hour had come. Shells crashed into the gun positions, shattered the guns, blew the gunners to bits, and exploded the piles of ammunition. The roofs and walls of the dugouts collapsed, and they were filled with acrid fumes; the observers fell out of their trees or were smashed to pulp against the walls of their pill-boxes, between Poivre ridge and Damloup death garotted the garotters, steel axes shattered the shell-smithies. When the attack was actually launched on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, no more than ninety batteries in the whole area answered the enemy bombardment.

The enemy bombardment. . . . The Germans had held on hitherto beyond all imagination, these seven weakened divisions, about seventy thousand men, scattered and lost in that ravaged land. They had starved, they had crouched waist-high in watery slime, they had burrowed into the mud because it was their only cover, they had not slept, they had struggled against fever and held on. And now they were beginning to crack. The air had turned to thunder, and burst upon them in a thudding tornado of steel cylinders, packed with ekrasite. Impossible to leave the trenches, which indeed were trenches no more; impossible to stay in them, when the very earth quivered and split, and leapt in volcanoes to the sky or poured into ever fresh abysses that were opened on every side. The dugouts, in which the men took refuge, collapsed; the deeper galleries, choked by heavy shells, buried their struggling, gasping occupants, who were no further use as fighting men, though they might be actually unhurt.

Behind the trenches lay the spattering, edged steel barrier of the field guns. Inside the trenches the vertical fire of the heavies and the trench mortars did their work. The machine-guns were swept aside, the new mine-throwers were engulfed in mud or blown to pieces, and even the guns themselves were half buried in the deluge of clay and steel splinters. In February the Germans had created the battle of material, but they had unfortunately forgotten to reserve exclusive rights in it; the French had long since acquired it and mastered it by now. Their artillery, in close alliance with the infantry, worked systematically and in exact accordance with map and time-table, though firing quite blind. They covered the advancing infantry with a double line of moving fire; a hundred and sixty yards in front of it they created a death zone of shrapnel, and seventy or eighty yards in front of that, another of high explosive. The speed of the advance was exactly calculated: a hundred yards of impassable clay was to be traversed in four minutes.

At eleven-forty the French front began to move, in a thick mist. It had not lifted since the dawn; milk-white and opaque, as in the high mountains or at sea, it brooded over that land. No need of poisonous fumes to envelop the fighting zone in impenetrable haze. On that day visibility was less than four yards; no one saw the sun on October 24. With glazed and shattered eyes the German dead lay and stared up at the gods and their inscrutable decree; benumbed and paralyzed, the living awaited their fate; the survivors shrieked for barrage, to hold the advancing hosts, to turn aside their bayonets and their bombs, to help them to put up some semblance of a fight—though their adversaries were better fed, relieved at proper intervals, and not so exhausted by water-logged trenches. Quivering hands fired red rockets into the air: Barrage! But they vanished in the white haze. Those who fired them watched them soar into the milky pall that overhung the whole countryside. The artillerymen,



such as were still alive, their officers, bombardiers, and gun-crews, waited at their guns and saw nothing. The firing in front had ceased, everyone knew that; the French were now advancing, and now was the time to pepper their legs with contact shells, but in what direction? Not one red flicker in that fog; no telephone call sped over the shattered wires; sound-signals had not been arranged, nor was there any direct co-operation with the infantry; only the Group Commands had the right to issue orders to the artillery.

The minutes passed. The men in the trenches stared their eyes out of their heads. "There . . . there . . . over there—can't you hear? Can't you see?" What was the sense in waiting to be slaughtered, with the heavy guns out of action and without artillery support? The Fatherland could not ask them to suffer more than they had already suffered. Men alone and little groups of men threw away their rifles and waded out into the slime and mist, into the torn, contorted wire entanglements, stumbling and slipping among the shell-holes, holding their hands up when they could. "Kamerad!" they cried into the mist. "Kamerad!"

Kamerad—that word would be understood; a man who cried "Kamerad!" and raised his hands was deemed to have surrendered and was spared; a man who abused the word perished and with him a good many of his fellows. Kamerad—there they came, out of the mist, shadowy forms in blue cloaks, slipping and stumbling, with packs and bayonets fixed, and beneath the steel helmets, faces of every shade of brown: French colonial regiments from Senegal, the Somali coast, and Morocco; Bretons; men of the Midi; Parisians from the boulevards; and peasants from Touraine. To each and all of them France was a mother; all knew that they were fighting for a reasonable freedom of thought and action in driving the invader out of France. Unromantic warriors, they cursed and laughed as they clambered out of the storm-

positions and then moved forward, dark and deadly figures, pale with resolution. But they knew their task, those bright young sons of France; to them too it had been said: "One more effort and the deed is done." Silently they let the German prisoners through, and sent them back to the reserves in the rear; then they crossed the German line and advanced on their objectives, of which the central points were Douaumont and Vaux. They made their way into all the ravines and gullies and overran the wooded slopes of Lauffée as far as Chapître wood, from the Thiaumont line to the Ravin des Dames, from Nawe wood to the stone quarries of Haudraumont. On the German left wing the trench systems named after Generals Clausewitz, Seidlitz, Steinmetz, and Kluck were lost; in the centre, the Adalbert line and all that was once called Thiaumont; and on the right wing, the valleys and trenches and shattered woodland between Douaumont village and Poivre ridge. The three French divisions drove onwards, stormed the dugouts and reserve positions, and fell upon the batteries with cold steel, taking tardy vengeance for the hail of shell and shrapnel that had tormented them so long. Would they break right through?

At many places in the sector the front held. On the declivity to the north of Douaumont village, in Caillette wood, to the east of Fumin, and on the hills of Vaux, the Germans clung to their ground, and met the attackers with bombs or such machine-guns as had survived. The fighting lasted all day until darkness fell. The defence of the Germans did them honour, but it did them little good. Next day the French artillery reopened their terrible onslaught, which nothing could now withstand. Two days before it had still been inferior in numbers to the German artillery; now it dominated the battlefield; long-range guns were emplaced on the eastern slope of Douaumont and smashed the casemates of Vaux with intensive fire; Caillette wood was combed with a fiery comb; it cleared the way for infantry and shattered the

outworks of Vaux. Field batteries moved forward to turn the German flank, secured a footing on the steep eastern slope of Douaumont, cutting all the rear communications, as the surgeon's knife shears off a shattered arm, left hanging only by the sinews and the skin. Go back, you German soldiers, you have striven enough. What the French had planned to take in four hours, they partly took in two, but part only after four days' savage struggle. They made seven thousand of you prisoners and killed and wounded thrice as many more; you have paid enough for your 53 pfennigs a day, and the ore deposits of Briey and Longwy. In the impenetrable mist you put forth the last of your strength, in obedience to orders that you could not understand. Poseners, Lower Silesians, men of the Mark and Westphalia, Pomeranians or Saxons, peace is what you need, and peace you have—the peace of death. Protestants, freethinkers, Catholics, and Jews, from the clay of Verdun and from the mist your agonized corpses come forth, and vanish once again; your deeds of gallantry are all too soon forgotten; scarce a pale reflection of your sufferings hovers in the memory of those who were once your comrades. . . . But what of Douaumont?

Since the twenty-third, the smoke of shell explosions hangs over Douaumont like a vast black banner.



## CHAPTER II: BREAK-THROUGH

IN the days that preceded the final fighting, the Fosses wood detachment marched out in the morning and returned in the afternoon with the regular alternation of a pendulum. To keep the mud out of their boots the men swathed their legs in rags, and so marched in moderate ease. The relaying of the field-railway sleepers, which had already begun to sink into the mud, was not a pleasant task, but there were many dirtier ones. And in the fog there was little danger to the working parties. In such conditions Franz wisely spared his shrapnel. It was a shock to leave Wild Boar valley for the Steinbergquell park; Kroysing had been right. In those days many men lost heart; and they were known by the way they stared into vacancy with wrinkled brows and drawn set lips as they tramped blindly through the slime with which the roads were covered. It splashed and churned and squelched and gurgled, and spurted over a man's knee if he was too intent upon his thoughts to poke his stick into the slime-masked potholes that awaited the unwary A.S.C. man's boots. Day followed day, and the pendulum swung back and forward undisturbed. . . . They had just reached the height called Ville, when a dull boom rumbled out of the distance. Far behind, out of sight, a heavy gun had spoken, after weeks of ominous silence. As they listened and eyed each other, there came a sudden sound like rain pattering on to a wooden roof, far away and terrible—the Verdun cannonade as it had been in those dreadful months of summer, but this time the guns were French! Gloomily they set forth on their homeward march. From beyond the horizon came the

flicker and rattle of the bombardment as they marched into the hutments. They heard it as they made their way to the kitchen. They heard it as they washed their cooking-pots, and hours later when their supper rations were issued. As he went to sleep, Private Bertin thought of Kroysing, of Süssmann, of the unspeakable Niggel, of the Saxons in their packed trenches; and he sighed heavily and turned over.

In the night the uproar grew more violent; next morning it had swelled to a massed and rhythmic thunder from behind the hills. As they marched out, they heard it, and they heard the German reply, one shot every two minutes—shells were short. Shaking their heads they went about their morning labours, and found themselves in the hutments again before dinnertime. Something like a sigh of relief went through the ranks when word was passed round in the early afternoon, that all working parties were suspended, and every man was to stand by to unload ammunition. They were of course kept waiting a good two hours, arguing and gossiping, until at last a serpentine line of trucks was shunted by two locomotives on to the siding; forty or fifty trucks, they did not trouble to count. The men were told off by sections, spat on their hands, and set to work. Some of them, who had done this sort of job before, climbed into the opened trucks and fitted a wicker carrier on to each man's shoulders, in which a slim or squat fifteen-centimetre shell stood up like a sheaf of arrows in an antique quiver. Under this unwonted load the men of the working parties tramped cautiously along the slippery timbered pathways. With much groaning and panting the shells were rolled off their shoulders and stacked between grassy hillocks; the heaviest weighed eighty-five pounds. On the way back each man stretched his joints, to prepare himself for another load of steel. Even before darkness fell, miners' lanterns were hung inside the trucks, and their dim reflection lit from underneath the faces of the three men



between the sliding doors. And as they bent and again stood up, and as the others passed in endless procession, dipped their shoulders to the burden, moved on and vanished into the deepening twilight, to Bertin's vision they seemed like the minions of destiny, from whom the sons of mortal men received their allotted burdens. Here each man was no more than a number, a pair of shoulders and two legs. The tramp of nailed boots benumbed his brain and banished thought. When, about eleven o'clock, the last trucks were emptied, the sturdy Karl Lebede had carried just the same number of shells as Bertin, who was slight and far from strong, and Pahl, who was almost a hunchback.

The milky air of the following dawn breathed damp and chill, and over the park, with its hutments and ammunition dumps, the sun was not to show itself that day. A few yards away the cooks who were serving out the morning coffee looked like demons amid the wreathing smoke from their cauldrons, pale and shadowy forms bestowing goblets of Lethe on the departed spirits. Then the working parties set out—four of them—for Ornes valley, Height 310, Chaume wood, and Fosses wood; but in barely two hours they had all returned, hell had broken loose in front, and there was no getting there. Immovable above the camp hung the fleecy pall, smothering all sound and islanding the park. The A.S.C. men were delighted to stay in their billets and get some rest; the park commandant, Lieutenant Benndorf, knew they had had a hard time last night, and there might be a harder time before them. Suddenly, about midday, the rumour spread that the French had broken through, that Douaumont had fallen, and that there was a gap in the front line. Within a quarter of an hour a vague uneasiness had possessed the minds of nearly all the men. The N.C.O.'s were sent for; and they, and all who were trained to arms, returned, pale and silent; they had been

served out with carbines and ammunition, and in half an hour they might be using them. The A.S.C. men forgot to laugh. If matters had come to such a pass that their pacific N.C.O.'s had been fetched away to fight, then they and the recruits from the depots in Crépion and Flabas would be flung with picks and shovels into the gap in the line. Halezinsky, the gas worker, met with general agreement when he observed: "Well, if they've got no one left but the likes of us, they'd better make peace." But after dinner the men's spirits improved, mainly as a result of their utter isolation from the world, which gave them a delusive sense of security. At half-past two they were detailed for work as usual; and indeed before that all who knew their way about the front line had been ordered to report at the field-gun park. Bertin joined them. It was not clear whether the order covered him, as he had had no experience of handling field-gun ammunition. But he did know his way about the front line, that was indisputable; no doubt it was information that was wanted.

Guides were what was wanted. A throng of N.C.O.'s and officers of the field artillery were gathered round a map in Bombardier Schulz's hut, while the gun carriages were packed with ammunition, and yet more was piled into small trolleys. Fresh batteries were coming up; some from the practice grounds in the rear, and some from beyond the Meuse; a carrier pigeon and some runners had brought in news; today was a black day. Bertin was promptly told off to the gunners who were to take up ammunition at once by the narrow-gauge railway—the very line which had guided him to the telephone hut in the Wild Boar valley. At the words "Wild Boar valley" a spark flashed through Bertin's mind; Kroysing! Süssmann! If they had escaped, they would certainly be there. He dashed back to his hut to get his overcoat, gas-mask, tarpaulin, and haversack, not forgetting his gloves, which would help him to push

and brake the trucks. Before starting out he was told to ring up the halt from the park exchange, to see whether the line was still in order. At the moment there was no reply.

The strange gunners wore braid on the collars; they were attached to the Guard Reserve Division, so they said; Pomeranians, tall men, who talked very quickly and in Low German. In the trucks lay the slim, brass-cased field-gun shells, like rows of cartridges for some gigantic rifle. Creaking and groaning, the long, low ammunition train moved forward into the void. Never had Bertin had so strong a sense of challenging the unknown as when, in that half-light, he left the familiar hutments, clinging to the front truck. A void to the right of him, a void to the left, in front a few yards of railway line, and behind him two trucks visible and one barely so, two gunners beside them, and beyond that a dissolving mass of forms and sounds. Otherwise all was still. The men's heads seemed to touch the clouds. Their feet, the feet of veterans, stepped mechanically from one sleeper to the next, or along the planks laid alongside the line to serve as a footwalk. Not a shot to be heard. The Germans did not know where the remnants of their infantry had rallied, and where the French were reforming at the moment. The one thing certain was that Douaumont was lost, and that the Corps would, when possible, start a counter-thrust in support of the artillery. Bertin had heard so much during the few minutes he had waited in Bombardier Schulz's hut. But he also heard—and felt more hopeful—that Douaumont had been voluntarily evacuated in the course of the night. Voluntarily—that was a word that often covered many dubious activities. In the same instant the idea that had flashed through Bertin's mind before now came back. A man like Kroysing did not go farther from his post than was absolutely necessary. Was it three o'clock or five? Time had dissolved in clouds, as space into yellow haze.



Wild Boar valley . . . Could this be it? A confusion of shouts and cries and curses: "Fourth company!" "Where the hell's my lot?" "Stretcher-bearers forward!" "The second battalion—all that's left of it!" "N.C.O.'s stand by for orders!" That lovely autumn solitude, that paradise of beech and mountain ash—its time had come at last. A scatter of grey rocks loomed among the ravaged woodland. The little stream had overflowed, choked by felled tree-trunks. Stumps and lopped beech trunks and torn branches, scarred and gashed, stood up out of the mist, as Bertin left the main line to mount the familiar path. Men were standing in the water, trying to clear the stream, disentangling the contorted rails, and knocking up rough bridges out of sleepers. Sappers, A.S.C. men, and Saxon infantry were all bearing a hand; and among them, giving orders, Bertin thought he could hear a familiar voice. On the steep slope of the ravine a group of undamaged trees still offered a little cover. There many exhausted figures with grey faces and heavy bandages round their heads and arms sat and sprawled and slept. Torn tunics, ragged trousers, their wearers caked in clay; and here and there great dark pools of blood. The little man directing the work, with his left hand in a sling improvised from haversack straps, was Sergeant Süssmann. He was superintending the clearance of a siding which the choked stream had blocked with mud and slush. "Hullo, my lad," said he; "another merry meeting, eh?" His eyes had lost their restlessness and were now quite steady and clear, but his hair was singed, and his face blackened with smoke. Bertin, without further questions, said: "Where's the lieutenant?" "Inside," answered Süssmann, "telephoning." "I'm to test the wire, and ring up the park if I can." Bertin was still eyeing him, his mouth half open. "When the egg's laid, the hen clucks. Go inside, we fixed it up not ten minutes ago."

The top half of a beech tree, complete with all its branches and yellow foliage, lay across the corrugated

iron roof of the blockhouse. Near the wall of the hut, on tarpaulins spread over a tangled heap of branches, lay three figures, covered with mud from head to foot, and their overcoats caked with a layer of clay. Something in the cut of the tunics revealed them as officers. The branches provided a sort of natural spring mattress. Their gaunt faces—one of them a boy's face—and closed eyes gave them an odd look of dirty plaster casts of death masks. But these death masks were talking to each other, listlessly, in Saxon speech, though the faces remained quite expressionless. "Is that mad sapper inside?" "Do you think he's mad?" "Of course he is. Look at his eyes. And the way he grinds his teeth. Retake Douaumont . . . !" "His proper place is a padded cell," giggled the one with the boy's face. "But," interjected the third, "suppose this same lunatic does get orders that Douaumont is to be retaken, would you stand in?" The eldest, his chin covered with brown stubble, said nothing for a while. At the bottom of the ravine the stream, now free from its encumbrances, rippled along as usual. At last he answered: "Of course he's mad, and of course it's folly. But how if it failed because you wouldn't back it up? In this bloody mist a surprise attack might, by a miracle, succeed." "A hundred to three it fails." "A hundred to three, of course—fifty to one, if you like. If the place wasn't an almighty bog, but as it is . . ." "And as we all think it mad, we shall all three join in, and drag a lot of other folks into the show, simply because we daren't stand out." "Now then, Seidewitz, keep your hair on, it's just a way we have in the army. Besides, a madman gets a lot of things done."

As Bertin opened the door, he knew that his worthy Baden Landstürmers had made tracks in good time, as soon as they caught the faintest flash of gunfire. At the switchboard crouched a tall figure with the headphones over his ears, savagely shifting the plugs without result and shouting: "Hullo! Hullo!" Bertin closed the door

gently, and in that scene of horror he could not suppress a silent chuckle, as he announced himself with a click of his heels, and said: "May I try, sir?" Kroysing started up, glared and bared his teeth in a wolfish smile. "Right; it's your job," and he slammed the headphones on to the little table.

Bertin, throwing his cap on to the bed of Strumpf, the park-keeper, tested the only connexions that could be made on that paltry little board. To the central exchange—in order; forward, to Douaumont—broken; to the rear, via the Cape camp—also in order. There the telephonist replied in a tone something like surprise; he made the connexion to the Steinbergquell park. At this point there was a slight hitch. Schneider, the telephonist who happened to be on duty, was a pompous personage who took it upon himself to advise Bertin to get back as quickly as possible, and not shirk unloading shells. The park seemed to be suffering from an attack of nerves, for the terse request not to talk rubbish, but to connect with Damvillers at once, was met with the angry retort—what in hell had he got to do with Damvillers? Instead of replying, Bertin turned to Kroysing. He, with ominous calm, bent over the mouthpiece. "You bloody little swine, if you speak another word, I'll report you for insubordination in the field. Get through to Damvillers at once!" Far away, in the smoky park telephone exchange, Schneider of the A.S.C. nearly fell off his chair. That was not Bertin's insignificant voice; it was the voice of a beast of prey, whose claws might be dangerous to better men than an elementary schoolmaster. "Very good, sir!" he stuttered into the instrument, and made the connexion. "Officer commanding sappers, Captain Lauber." Again Kroysing sat down at the instrument, gave his name, and was understood. Bertin stood beside him, filling a pipe; but when he observed that the conversation was likely to be a long one, he spread a newspaper over the bottom end of the straw sack and lay down for a few minutes, following



the example of the Saxons outside. Men like those, covered with a layer of coagulating slime, helpless with exhaustion, should have been on exhibition in the Damvillers club or a Dresden concert room, to bring home the reality of war. And yet would it have availed anything?

A strange conversation. Captain Lauber greeted Lieutenant Kroysing in a tone of heartfelt relief, thankful that he was still alive and able to report. Where was he speaking from? Lieutenant Kroysing was speaking from a field railway siding, a blockhouse in Wild Boar valley. It was the nearest telephone station from Douaumont to the rear, and he had thought at once that this, if anything, might have survived that ghastly bombardment. To report in brief: there had been hell to pay at Douaumont, the French had never put over so much heavy stuff, they must certainly be using the new forty-centimetre mortars. The upper works had been shattered at five points; fire had broken out in the sapper depot—those damned flares had caught fire again, and then filled the place with poisonous fumes; the dressing-station had been hit again, with heavy casualties; there was no water to put out the fires, the pipes were broken, and his men were trying—he was perfectly serious—to get the fire under by squirting it with spare seltzer water, but with not much result. The troops in the fort had suffered severely, including the A.S.C. All this had happened in the course of the previous afternoon and evening. And then—and he must be allowed to say he could not see the reason for it—had come the order for the evacuation of the fort. His voice had regained the calm deep tones in which he usually spoke, but in it was a faint tremor of fury ill-suppressed. Captain Lauber seemed to ask some question indicative of surprise. No, replied Kroysing, he would not have issued such an order had he been in command of the fort. Only the upper casemates had been damaged by the forty-centimetre mortars, together

with the brickwork and the roofing. The concrete cellars were untouched; the men could have sat in them as safely as in the vaults of a bank. True, there was gas about, and poisonous fumes, a shortage of water, and discomfort of every kind. But that hardly seemed a reason for giving up Douaumont, a place that had been bought and held at the cost of fifty thousand dead. Explosion? There might indeed be concealed mines, but that was a trifling risk that the Fatherland might well expect her soldiers to face. He had strenuously opposed the evacuation; even when most of the units of the garrison were already outside, he begged the commandant to hold on; it was absurd to leave only Captain P. and his handful of artillery observers inside. This was obviously illogical. Either the risk of explosion rendered Douaumont no fit place for German soldiers, and in that case not for gunners either; or it was essential to the campaign and then, damn it all, it must be defended. He had spoken his mind pretty freely in the course of the night, and this morning he had succeeded in getting these crazy orders withdrawn, some machine-guns brought up, and troops assembled. The moment the French stopped firing at half-past eleven he slipped round to the rear with a few dependable men to collect the marooned gunners, but before he could get together more than thirty or forty just above the village, the Moroccans had got through that blasted mist into the fort. They had captured that precious position without firing a shot. (He was almost weeping with fury; Bertin eyed him in a sort of helpless bewilderment.) He could not believe that the evacuation was intended to be final. Headquarters had come to a premature decision on insufficient information, because of a little smoke. If he might speak his mind, the Herr Captain would put all he could into getting a counter-attack under way immediately. The French had not yet established themselves in the fort, indeed they had pushed forward a good



distance beyond it, and from all that could be heard through the mist, they had met with powerful resistance to the south-west of Douaumont. The artillery fire had not diminished in that direction, the machine-guns could still be heard, and but for the mist the barrage would not have started half an hour too late; something could surely yet be done. His intention was, unless he received explicit orders to the contrary, to collect some infantry units and sappers and move cautiously forward in the direction of Douaumont. The voice that spoke so imploringly into the instrument under the sounding-board of that low roof was now silent for a moment. Kroysing listened to what the other said, apparently holding his breath. "Thank God!" he gasped in relief; and then twice in succession: "Thank God!" He would inform the Saxon officers accordingly. Above the village of Douaumont there were certainly isolated groups still holding out, and from there towards the east and to the rear they must rally these scattered units. Might he rope in any A.S.C. men he came across? Every available man would be needed to put the roads in order, clear the wreckage, and rebuild the dugouts. He promised the Herr Captain, he added emphatically, that he would do his best, and if he got through, he would report again from somewhere. Meantime, he thanked Captain Lauber for his kindness and wished him good-bye. Again he sat for a moment motionless, took off the headphones, swung himself and his chair towards Bertin, with his shoulders out-thrust and his arms between his lanky thighs. "Have you got any tobacco, Bertin?" he asked, and filled his large round pipe.

The windows of the blockhouse were small, and the light was very dim. But the eyes in that mud-spattered face still flashed. Bertin was well aware that there was a private report yet to come. "And Captain Niggel?" he asked softly. "Given us the slip," said Kroysing; "for the moment he's given us the slip. Without signing.

What do you know about that?" The flame from his lighter lit his hard features for a few moments. "For the last month, and especially the last four days, he was eating out of my hand. We had a little confidential talk; all was going well, and the family reputation looked like being cleared at last. His hair was going grey, the blighter; he started blubbering about his children and begged for mercy. I offered to let him go in return for his signature, as soon as the French bombardment stopped. Then this order for evacuation blew in and he was off; slipped out of my hand just as it was going to close. I don't understand it," he said, shaking his head; "here are the French getting this brute out of his mess, and so putting the wind up those fatheads in the rear that they go and evacuate Douaumont. But"—and he raised himself to his full height and clenched his fists—"he shan't escape me. I won't give up the game yet. He can't have got far, and I'll catch him again if I have to grab him by the scruff of his neck. But first I must deal with those gentry opposite who have had the impertinence to turn me out of my little private hell. Well, I'll show them," he said, straightening his belt, from which swung the heavy service revolver; "there's still a crate of bombs waiting for them somewhere. . . . I always wanted to get back at them for killing Christoph, though not before I'd got that signature, of course. Well, the sequence of events has altered, that's all. Will you walk a little way with me towards the front, Bertin? You had a friend of your youth somewhere around, hadn't you?"

A knock at the door forestalled Bertin's reply; two soldiers in steel helmets came in, followed by little Süssmann, who splashed in with soaking boots. "This is the man, sir," he said. "It's a bit dark, isn't it?" observed a youthful voice, which Bertin thought he had heard before. He got out Friedrich Strumpf's candle and lit it; they were two field artillerymen, a lieutenant and a bombardier, whom he had seen in the dark. "You're

pretty comfortable here, my lad," said the lieutenant to Kroysing; then he recognized his error; the officers greeted each other like fellow-passengers on a railway journey. The young gunner with the Guards' badges had come to look for his guide. Kroysing laughed, he must mean his friend Bertin, who had arrived with artillery ammunition. "Right," said Lieutenant von Roggstroh, "you're the chap I want; the sergeant said you would show us the shortest way up to a battery position—ten-point-five field howitzers; how about it?" Bertin replied that he had spoken to Lieutenant Kroysing and was quite ready to go, but he had just had a telephone message from his company ordering him to return at once. He would put the Herr Lieutenant through to the park, so that he could explain. He manipulated the switches, and listened; the Cape camp was engaged. "Never mind," said the gunner; "you can take a chit back with you." The Badeners had packed up hurriedly, a letter beginning "Dear Fanny" still lay in a drawer. Von Roggstroh took his glove off and scrawled with a pencil in clear German script: "I have requisitioned the bearer of this as a guide," signed his name and rank, and folded it up. Bertin slipped it into his cuff. Kroysing eyed him reflectively. Then he turned to Roggstroh, who had just given up his attempt to decipher a map. "Mind you look after the lad, he's an unarmed Landsturmer. They're the sort of men that are needed in the army, don't you think? Cadets, with a decent education." Bertin flushed. "Jews too?" he asked with an effort. Von Roggstroh lifted his eyebrows. "Oh, come! That won't wash, in the artillery, in 1916." Kroysing, as he got ready to go—slipping on his mud-caked soaked overcoat and storm equipment, clapping on his helmet last of all—said: "I should dispute that. Heave the switches over and off to Brandenburg, shunt the truck, and the signal's at all clear." "Do you really mean that?" asked Bertin. Kroysing eyed him squarely and shrugged his shoulders. At the door he



turned. "I mean, more or less, that it's your duty to your Prussian State. Every man must risk his neck once." He flung open the creaking door.

They all stepped out into the damp air of the gully, on the left slope of which a fire was burning. Shadows flickered past, and by the fire some vague forms crouched and warmed themselves. The three Saxon officers were no longer lying; they were sitting among the fallen branches, smoking and shivering. Kroysing walked up to them, his hand to his helmet, and they talked. Then some blasts on whistles, soldiers dashed up and gathered in little groups on the left bank of the stream. Kroysing strode back with the air of a giant refreshed. "The officers," he said to Roggstroh, "have decided to reconnoitre towards Douaumont with my sappers, clear things up a bit, and try to make contact with the higher ground. They've got more than five hundred rifles; something can be done with that. And now listen to me, my boy. If you find any guns undamaged, for God's sake fire them in the direction of Douaumont, at any sort of range. Just think—if we could get the old hole back again!" "Do you think that's possible?" asked the other. "Anything's possible with courage and a great deal of luck. Get along, Süssmann," he said, turning to the little man, "you know the lie of the land. Go in front, but keep your eyes skinned." Süssmann mimicked a click of the heels. "So long, Bertin," and he gave him his hand; "I wonder where we shall meet again. Let me present you with this pot as a parting gift," and he took off his helmet, poised it on the tips of his fingers and put it on Bertin, thrusting his oil-cloth cap under his arm. "There'll be plenty to choose from up yonder and you must keep that great brain of yours intact," and he walked away, a short-haired boyish figure. "Here our ways part," said Kroysing; and he sniffed the air. "There's a smell of winter; what a cheery Christmas we shall have! . . . Ah, listen. . . ." From the void that began a few paces away, came a dull thudding, which

sounded as though it were padded with cotton-wool. "Franz is beginning again, damn him; we've let ourselves in for a bit too much, and gone on as if we had the victory in our pockets. That never does any good. Well, so long, Bertin, once more, and keep your tail up, my young friend," he added, with a wave of his right hand. "Happy New Year to everyone and *vive la guerre!*" He saluted, turned, and strode, phantom-like, into the all-engulfing mist. "Well, let's get on," said Lieutenant Roggstroh. "It can't get much darker." They crossed the gully on the newly laid plank gangways, in which Roggstroh recognized the kindly forethought of the sappers and A.S.C. who were anxious that the gunners should go dry-legged as long as possible.

Beside the fires the wounded tossed and groaned in fever. From among them there rose up a tall man with eyes tightly closed, who reported: "Buried, Herr Doctor; Cadet Lobedanz, University of Heidelberg, at present in the field." Then he sat down again, and set his hands against the rock overhead as though to prevent it falling on him. They mounted the crumbling path that led to the battery. The lieutenant flashed his pocket torch from side to side; and once he lit up the "signpost," that dead Frenchman who still stood nailed to his beech tree by a shell-splinter. Bertin sickened, not for the first time. The lieutenant said: "Well, if that's your idea of a joke . . ." Like great night birds German shells swooped overhead, none knew whence nor whither. Bertin's heart throbbed heavily as he reflected that Lieutenant Schanz must be dead; otherwise they would have heard the roar of his howitzers "giving a concert," as he described it. The din of battle, which deepened every quarter of an hour, came from somewhere ahead of them, slightly to their left. Then a sharp burst of rifle-fire; Kroysing's men. "We hold Caillette wood," said the lieutenant; "we also hold Fort Vauz and Damloup. Or we did two hours ago. What's the battle-line like? How

do we stand at Douaumont?" "We're at a disadvantage," answered Bertin; "Douaumont dominates the whole area." As they emerged at the top, walking at a goose step and probing the ground a pace or two ahead with their sticks, they could hear the artillery duel more clearly, though nothing was visible. Out of the mist appeared a form, a corporal, panting and quivering with terror. He was lost; he belonged to some battalions in reserve, which had been ordered up that very afternoon to round up the French shock troops between there and Douaumont; and near by was a small group of men from the extreme left wing, cut off from the main body; lost in the desolation of ravaged earth, struggling blindly on, expecting at any moment to be engulfed in a flooded shell-hole. Lieutenant Roggstroh decided to take the men with him; they were men from the Mark, Brandenburgers of the Fifth Reserve Division. The leading file, of which four men survived, was waiting motionless, paralysed by panic; the others came up with them a moment or two later. They had been afraid that this footpath led straight into the jaws of the French. They trotted gratefully behind the officer like children lost in a forest who attach themselves to a strange mother when they have lost their own. They doubted if there was a single living creature surviving in that wilderness. The French had attacked suddenly, appearing after a terrific bombardment, but had been thrown back. "They're fed up to the teeth, too," said one of the four, worn out with sleeplessness, and caked from head to foot in mud. "Anyone that falls down wounded hereabouts gets drowned in muck, whether he's a Frenchman or a German," and he made an embracing movement with both arms. At this point the artillery sergeant opened his mouth; he had hitherto been listening and looking about him intently and prodding the crumbling soil with his stick. "How are we ever going to get the guns up?" he groaned. "Our poor nags . . ." The lieutenant did not answer; he shrugged his shoulders;



he too loved the horses of his battery, as could be seen from his frown. Suddenly the scream and crash of the French shrapnel fire began once more; the shell-bursts could be heard, but nothing seen. They were clearly shelling the main valley. That was meant for Kroysing, thought Bertin dully; no matter now. At last a splintered tree loomed up out of the mist, and what looked like a wall of earth or a rock. And Bertin said, gasping for breath: "Somewhere on the right, a bit lower down. They had no bombs out here nor carbines." He strode on and disappeared from view. "Schanz!" the others heard him call. "Lieutenant Schanz!" A groan seemed to answer from the void—or was it an echo? With bated breath the seven men that followed Bertin entered the wrecked battery. They flashed their torches all round them, and the white cones of light pierced the wall of mist ahead. The stone and earthwork of the defences had been blown to pieces. Fragments of wire hung across the pathway from split and shattered trees. All around lay the contorted forms of dead men. Heavy gun Number Four, with its mounting, had been tipped back by a direct hit. The gunners' dugout had been blown up and gaped like a stalactite cave; the entrance was deep in blood-soaked slime. The neighbouring gun seemed undamaged, but its breech-block had been shot away. The ammunition dump behind had exploded in all directions and wrecked another dugout. A rain of shells must have completely engulfed the two other guns; Number one, with its barrel bowed down, looked like a great beast broken at the knees. "The French have been in here," said the infantry corporal as he flashed his torch round him and picked up a shallow steel helmet. "Looks like it," agreed Lieutenant von Roggstroh's voice, in level tones. On the ground lay three gunners, two armed with shovels, and one with the ramrod in his hand. "Where's our officer?" "Here," said the sergeant, flashing his torch on to Bertin, who was kneeling on the

ground. Beside him lay an outstretched body with a gaping wound in its chest, apparently both stabbed and shot; and he felt the pulse of a hand that still clutched a pistol, club-wise, by the barrel. "Take that light away," he said. "I can see quite well." "It is not given to every man," said Lieutenant von Roggstroh, "to see so plain a picture of his own end." Bertin said nothing; he closed the dead man's eyes with careful finger-tips, as though the touch of them was painful. There was a strange aloofness within him, mute and griefless. What could be the sense in it? Had we not all believed in a Father in heaven, and then later on, in some disposing purpose in life? And now—this. What a monstrous world! And this boy had been so fond of life. Groans came from the surrounding darkness, from the dugout a gasping shriek, and an agonizing muttering from the shattered gun. "My leg!" cried an unmistakable Upper Silesian voice. "Oh, God . . . Oh, God." A man, propped against a limber, whom they had taken for dead, suddenly clapped both hands to his head and stuttered out an account of what had happened. He had been hit on the head with the butt-end of a gun. A throng of brown devils had fallen upon them, but even before that the air was thick with shells. The stretcher-bearers and their dugout had gone west first; the lieutenant had held out till the end. Then the gunner had got his crack on the head and remembered no more. "Well there he lies," said Lieutenant von Roggstroh. "It's going to be a grand night." Then he gave orders to collect the dead and do what was possible for the wounded. "We must fix ourselves up here." Bertin suddenly felt frozen. "I think," he said doubtfully, "I shall have to go back now." The lieutenant eyed him. "What are you doing in the A.S.C.? The sapper was right, you ought to get transferred, you might do well with us." "I don't think," said Bertin, "I shall ever volunteer for anything again. A man mustn't kick against the pricks." "So you're a Bible reader, eh?"



said the lieutenant in a faintly contemptuous tone, "Well, get along then, you know your way." Bertin hesitated; he set some store by this young man's esteem, and he replied that the life of a private in the A.S.C. was not particularly enviable. "I know that," said the lieutenant; "but people like you must take responsibility, and not get lost in the mass." Bertin thought that he had taken a great deal of responsibility, but it was impossible to explain that briefly to the lieutenant. He stepped across once more to look at his erstwhile neighbour Schanz, lying with a black, shattered chest, but the fair-haired head above it like the head of a man asleep. "I'll carry the sight of you away with me, Paul Schanz," said a whisper within him. For a moment or two he lingered beside the dead man; then he tore himself away, reported to the lieutenant, was dismissed, turned, made his way cautiously over the corpses, and plunged into the mist. In a few paces it engulfed him, effaced the world, and isolated that moving human form; he felt as though suspended in the void, and shuddered. And as he tramped on, bent like an old man, using his pocket torch as sparingly as he could, he felt suddenly exhausted and ready to collapse. He had had about enough, he must put in for leave; he could claim ten days, he had had four days in June, and the battalion owed him six; tomorrow, or in two days at the latest, he would send his application in to the company. Time and again he stopped, laid his hand round his ear, and listened to the dull reverberations from Vaux ridge, Hardaumont, Hassoule.

When a man is groping his way in the dark or with bandaged eyes, there is an inner impulse to bear towards the left. To this law that little force of about a hundred rifles quickly succumbed as it made its way out of Wild Boar valley on to open ground, a column long drawn out, moving at a goose step, sappers leading. He of the longest legs must needs find his way to the front; besides,

in that unruly heart burned a savage yearning to lay hands upon that heart's desire—whether a fortress, or a fugitive from it, he did not really know.

It was not long before Kroysing was alone. He did not notice that the winding trail of men behind him had lost their direction and were turning gradually towards the left; and to the left of Wild Boar valley lies, not Douaumont, but the hinterland. He, Eberhard Kroysing, had a guide within him and also one before him: the schoolboy Süssmann, who, always back and forward between the engineers and the fort, knew the main valley and the country round as well as he had known his way to school. Kroysing could barely see him, but he could hear him all the time, the rattle of his equipment, his voice as he shouted: "Shell-hole to the left!—Look out, railway lines!—Dud on the right!—Look out—stakes!—Firm ground—half right!" The little man splashed onwards, Kroysing waded after him, his eyes peering into the viewless wall of mist that grew every moment more ochrous, his hand clutching the butt of his pistol. His senses marched in front of him, tore at that accursed pall of mist; the heart within him raged to rend it; his teeth, tightly clenched, ground at something that eluded him—all the forces of resistance. This damned world had conspired against him. "We have brought the sky just a little too far down"; the phrase came back into his mind. How it had first occurred to him, he no longer knew, but true it was—or rather it was false; we had not brought it down far enough, we ought to have torn it down with all its denizen ghosts of folly and superstition; and now this foul mist had descended to cheat us of our prey in the hour of triumph. He swore under his breath as he listened for Süssmann and tried to catch the tramp of the Saxons behind him. Oh, the impotence of man! So long as he could not give orders to the weather, and devise some apparatus to blow away such exhalations, he was too powerless to carry on a war. We can call up mists, but

light—ah, that's beyond us still. Could he hear the Saxons or not? Would those blasted French batteries yonder in Caillette wood defeat this last despairing attempt likewise? A stream of sweat poured over his eyes into the corners of his mouth. "Süssmann!" he shouted imperiously. "Süssmann!" He stood above the knees in a pool of slime; he thrust his stick deep into the yielding soil, holding his left hand with the pistol high above his head, and struggled wildly to stand upright. "Süssmann!" Not a sound. He groaned with fury, wiped the spatter of mud from his mouth with the back of his hand, and listened. What was that sound behind him? Surely that was a voice calling on his right? And he realized at last that his venture had failed. It had been madness to begin it, the Saxons were right, the end of that day's work would be a nameless grave at the bottom of a shell-hole. . . .

A sudden crash above his head, a hissing scatter from above . . . shrapnel. Pray God they had not been seen. It's hailing, he thought with sardonic good humour; turn your collar up, Herr Kroysing. Yes, it was hailing, but luckily not in his immediate neighbourhood. Franz might be firing short or firing beyond the mark—who could tell? An airman, of course. An airman could tell. An airman, after all, knew everything. He was superior to his enemies, or rather he was set above them, a being of a higher order, a step ahead in the sluggish development of the vertebrate called man. And as he stood literally rooted to the ground—for where could he find refuge from leaden missiles he could hear hissing and screaming and crashing overhead—while his ankles sank more deeply into the viscous slime, the point of his spiked stick became more obstinately embedded, the water filled his shoes, but could not penetrate his leggings; while he stood there, bent and tense like a marten just about to leap, it flashed into his mind that the earth and not sky was what damned his efforts, the clay on which man is born and condemned to crawl about on till he dies and



is reabsorbed in it once more. No, my beloved, he thought, as he struggled to free his feet and get forward at whatever cost. Pah! he was no better than a springboard, for a man to stamp on and soar upwards and away. How fortunate that we had discovered the combustion engine—we, the lords of fire and of detonation! And in that moment, there flashed into his mind the unshakable resolve that he would become an airman. Once this blasted business was over, and the mess hereabouts cleared up; once Franz had had his nose smashed flat for daring to push it into what was German land. Then he knew someone that would shake the dust of sapperdom off his feet and join the forces of the air. To scratch about in muck was good enough for men like Süssmann and Bertin, men without the fighting instinct, without weight in their striking arms, men worn out too soon. But he, with a frail craft beneath him, two broad wings, and a whirling propeller—he would be off over the cloud-sea like the lark on Sunday; not, indeed, trilling songs, but hurling bombs that would scatter gas and bullets among the crawling multitudes below, and seeking out the duel from which only one returns.

There, as he stood, he drew himself up to his full height, gripped his pistol and shook it at the heavens, from which the shrapnel insistently hissed down.



**BOOK SIX**  
**ATTRITION**





## CHAPTER I: THE MIND OF A JEW

THE war had reached its peak: all the omens, hitherto favourable to the Germans, were imperceptibly reversed. For a nation so recently welded into a state, the Germans did wonders. With his left arm the Teutonic giant held off the Russian, already bleeding from a thousand wounds; with his right, he struck at the two sternest warriors of the last century, the British, before whom Napoleon went down, and the French, who under that same Napoleon had been the terror of the armies of their day. His right foot had crushed the warlike race of the Serbs into apparent impotence: with his left he had kicked the Rumanians out of action. The masses went their way in patience, the ruling class in utter unconcern; to the German race, the terror of the Romans in the Teutoburg forest, belonged, so they believed, the future, which they were now forcibly transforming into the present. Hardly a dozen men on earth knew that this giant carried a feeble brain beneath his iron helmet, incapable of grasping the present; and that, as always happened in the fairy tale, he was so greedy that he let go what was within his reach for the sake of some tremendous treasure that he wanted to stuff into his sack and carry away with him.

A feeble brain indeed. . . . The Saxon counter-attack on the night after the disaster came to as little as that of the Brandenburgers and Silesians, because every available rifle had already been flung into the breaches. The despondency resulting from these events was carefully concealed lest the national morale might be shaken. And in the highest quarters the French attack was accounted a matter of secondary importance. The staff studied the



mistakes that had been made, they learnt from the French the device of a movable front zone, a closer association between infantry and artillery; and they possibly regretted the decision taken at Pierrepont. But none of them dreamt that the French might not be satisfied with this success. They were blind with self-complacency. And yet the French commander was already preparing for the next thrust, and again it would succeed, being based on the clear thinking and a just appreciation of the facts; the heights of the Meuse were to be stormed. . . .

But that was not yet; at a junction like Damvillers, the officers' messes were crowded with busy gentlemen at lunchtime. Among them many a fresh face appeared, and one of those was the face of Captain Niggl. Captain Niggl went about his business in an unassuming sort of way—the officers and No. 3 Company of his battalion were stationed in Damvillers at the moment—but he was, in fact, labouring under the burden of fame. Captain Niggl was a hero. He had stayed faithfully at his post in Douaumont until the very last minute, at the head of his brave Bavarian A.S.C. men; and he would certainly get the Iron Cross I. Possibly, too, he would be promoted major before his due time, if his sovereign's military Cabinet consented, and receive a high Bavarian order on King Ludwig's birthday. There was betting in the club as to whether he would get his Iron Cross on January 18, on the anniversary of the Order, or on the twenty-seventh, which was the Kaiser's birthday. The little thick-set man wandered about among his friends, his rather gaunt face expressive of a somewhat peevish affability; but in his crafty eyes there was a gleam of triumph. The hair above his temples had grown grey or even white, but the victory was his. He had not signed, he had not let himself be humiliated by a blackguardly young lieutenant, now missing. He had bent, but he had not yielded. His wife, his children, and he himself would emerge unscathed from a trying affair; and so would Feicht and several

others. He owed himself a comfortable slice of leave at Christmas, so that he might be at home to fix up a nice little crib with the Jesus child, the shepherd and the ox and the ass, and regild the star of Bethlehem. Certain papers had surely been left behind in that damned hole, Douaumont, and Franz could wipe his behind with them. He had been tested and survived the test. With a genial if rather weary air he trudged through the little town of Damvillers, which he thought delightful, even in the rain. Anyone he visited felt honoured: and Herr Major Jansch, whom he visited with increasing frequency, felt extremely honoured.

Today he was sitting as usual in his office, at a writing-table strewn with newspapers, files, and large-scale maps. It was very gratifying for Major Jansch to be admired by the hero of Douaumont; and Niggel's admiration for the Prussian officer was profound.

Editor Jansch's superior knowledge did not tend to make him popular in Damvillers. But to Niggel, the revenue official, his ideas seemed very new and startling. Had he heard of the Freemasons' conspiracy against Germany? Never. And yet the Lodge of the Grand Orient (which was in the pay of France), had roused the world against the Reich; otherwise Rumania would not have been so foolish as to quarrel with the conqueror in the World War. And what about the Jewish press propaganda in favour of the enemy, hey? All the Jew journalists daily dipped their pens in poison and wrote against German Michael, and most of all the press Jew, Lord Northcliffe, whose pestilential papers had flooded the world with lying stories of atrocities, especially in Belgium. The English were well advised to have made the brute a peer: and the Americans, too, had half a dozen such, with Hearst at their head. They cropped up everywhere, these Semitic scribblers; he had one of the kind in his own company. The creature called himself Bertin, for some reason best known to himself. No doubt it was not many years since he had called himself

Isaaksohn, and came out of Lemberg. And now he actually had the face to apply for six days' leave, which he alleged had been due to him since the summer. He had gone home to get married, to some wretched little Sarah, whom he had tricked into marrying him to satisfy the regulations. The fellow got his leave, but only the minimum, naturally—four days. And now he had the impertinence to demand the other six, on the pretext that he had been in the field since the beginning of August. Really! Where else did he expect to be? And instead of humbly thanking the Prussian state for the privilege of wearing uniform, the fellow actually put in a claim for leave twice in one year, without regard for many others who had never been home at all. However, his application had luckily come into the right hands. No. 1 Company had duly put it forward with an explanatory note. And today he expected to receive his leave and travelling warrants at the orderly room with the other men due for leave. No one had told him that he would have to turn tail and march back to his unit on his own feet, and go on guard when he got there, which would give him leisure to ponder on his insolence. Indeed, the insolence of these Jews was beyond all imagination. So long as such people enjoyed equal rights with their racial superiors, Germany would never prosper in spite of all her heroic deeds. Such was his, Jansch's, confidential opinion, whether his friend Niggel believed it or not.

Niggel had nothing against the Jews, he did not know very many, but those with whom he came in contact had seemed adequate; and the Jewish officers in the Bavarian army had given quite a good account of themselves. He was well aware that Prussians, and more especially Austrians, had these odd ideas. In Bavaria it was only Dr. Sigl who had carried on a campaign against the Jews, though he had, in fact, been much more venomous about the Prussians. He personally had had much more trouble with various Protestants, though he naturally did not mention that to friend Jansch. However, it was no



matter to him if a Bavarian A.S.C. man got a dressing down, and was put on sentry duty instead of going home in the leave train. After all, he hadn't had too pleasant a time in Douaumont.

A pall of November drizzle hung over the roofs of Damvillers, and clouded the windows of the battalion headquarters. In the ground-floor office the lights had long been turned on. The occupants waited eagerly for the leave men of No. 1 Company, who, ten in all, would soon appear, headed by Herr Bertin. But in Bertin's place, in marched Staff-Sergeant Niklas, who also belonged to No. 1 Company: and he sat down beside the stove, looking very spruce and quietly contented. It had been so arranged that the people at Moirey, and especially Bertin himself, should suspect nothing; for, as a matter of course, the leave men were always ten in number, never eleven. So the joke must certainly come off. The men would be there by four o'clock. They were all on tip-toe to get away, and catch the train at Damvillers, and then at Montmédy get the connexion to Frankfurt. Well, let them kick their heels a bit, they had ten days' peace and quiet in front of them; and it was in the Prussian tradition that every blessing must be bought with a peck or so of trouble.

When Captain Niggl, peering through a crack in the door, caught sight of Private Bertin of the A.S.C., who was fated not to proceed on leave but to return to his unit, he recoiled. He had seen that face before. Not quite so pale as now under the glare of the electric light, and dashed by disappointment; but he had seen that face in Douaumont. The man who stood motionless while the sergeant curtly informed him that his application had been rejected, was one of Kroysing's blackmailing gang. He had then been often about with that little Sergeant Sussmann, or Süssmann—also a Jew. Was Herr Jansch right in this matter too, and had he, Niggl, of the Bavarian Revenue Office, been too careless hitherto? This must be investi-

gated. In any case the fellow must be got out of the way; he might know much, or little, or nothing at all, but he could not be allowed to go about and talk. That was a law of self-preservation, or rather, a necessity that knew no law. Niggel would keep his eye on the man and make a note of his name. The first and most important thing was to discover the whereabouts of the arch-villain. If he remained missing, as Captain Lauber had announced with such regret to the sympathetic Captain Niggel, then the work of clearance had better be continued and the rest of the conspirators removed. It was very right and proper that this man should not go on leave; he would certainly be given no leave until his name came up on the roster in the ordinary course. That might be in the spring or even in the summer, and much might happen before that. Captain Niggel, with his air of peevish affability and his little crafty eyes had profited greatly by the little scene that Major Jansch had staged, and he felt truly grateful. . . . Fellow looked a bit shaken, didn't he? Well, it would be a lesson to the uppish little brute, gold spectacles and all . . . what was his name? Bertin? Ah yes, Bertin. Unpleasant-looking sort of chap. Bertin—such prominent ears, like a photograph in a criminal register. Niggel of the Bavarian Revenue Office had had some experience of criminals, but he did not want to be offensive about his friend Jansch's No. 1 Company. Perhaps the Jews did really need to be watched. Well, he would think matters over before their next meeting, and perhaps join the Pan-German Union; the time had come to stand out against Freemasons, and insist on unlimited U-boat warfare.

Private Bertin of the A.S.C. set forth on the road to Moirey. All around him and within him the world was now monotonously grey. To the right and left of him lay an expanse of sodden land; within him throbbed a barren, sodden heart. The rain pattered in his face, trickled between the upturned collar of his overcoat and his chin, and down

into his scarf. It was not physical exhaustion that made him step so heavily round the edges of the puddles. He had done his due day's work on the construction of a track in the marshy ground between Gremilly and Ornes, where new field railways were called for by the readjusted front line. In good humour and a glow of expectation he had helped to bind faggots and lay a causeway through the alder thickets, on which the rails could be laid. They had toiled ankle-deep in water, but what did he care?

He was going on leave that day, tomorrow evening he would be with Lenore, and be for six long days a man once more in that beloved presence. He had gulped his dinner, hurriedly cleaned his equipment—his knapsack had been packed the day before—he had only to roll up his blankets and buckle them into place, and present himself, neat and smoothly shaven, at the orderly room. Without a warning word, although they knew what was coming, they had sent him with the other nine to Damvillers; indeed they had actually put him in charge in case of any queries by the military police or inquisitive officers as to the whence and whither of the little company. And then they let him fall into the abyss. In vain, at Battalion H.Q., had Diehl, the long-headed, black-eyed clerk, tried by much shaking of the head and winking to warn him what to expect. It was an utterly malicious trick—no matter who had actually contrived it. In any case, the decision had come from Major Jansch, the paltry little editor of *The Army and Navy Weekly*. He had pronounced judgment: no exceptions were ever made in the Prussian army, and no one went on leave twice in one year. This had an appearance of stern justice; but it was no more than a pretext. Anyone in the know was well aware that many favoured young gentlemen went home twice and three times in the year. Not on leave, of course, but on duty, and they served to secure the safe transport of boxes and crates whose contents were only too notorious. If only Metzler, who had helped him over his marriage leave in



the summer, had still been in his orderly room; but he had long since been drafted into the infantry. He remembered some lines from Goethe about villainy that reigns supreme.

Well, the cup must be drained to the dregs. A grin would run round the orderly room at the sight of a man so soon back from his leave. One or another of his squad would be sure to have a remark or two to offer. Moreover, he would not be able to go to bed and forget this sickening blow in sleep; he was detailed for sentry duty, and would have to stroll up and down, hour after hour in the rain and darkness, thinking . . . thinking. . . . Horror took possession of him as he trudged along that road—the same road along which the Crown Prince had sped so elegantly a few weeks before; an impersonal horror, it might be called, at a system that was made manifest in him, a humble private in the A.S.C., as in those cigarettes thrown out upon the road. All the sufferings, privations, and sacrifices that a common soldier has to bear are increased, so needlessly, by such humiliation. He had done his duty loyally, and for its own sake; there was nothing against him on that score. Nay, more: he had volunteered for posts of danger on more than one occasion and, as was fitting, had said nothing about it. And had his application been rejected without further ado in the company orderly room, it would indeed have been a blow, but in such times of crisis he would have acquiesced. But these men had staged a scene purely in order to gloat over his humiliation. He could still see the door from the anteroom into the orderly room open slightly, and eyes and a bit of nose introduced into the gap. That was intolerable. That was the blow below the belt that brought any man to the ground.

The wind whistled through the branches of the trees and shrubs, the road dipped and ran along the edge of a steep slope; below him lay Moirey station with a few twinkling lights, and to his right, black against the dark sky, the hutments of the camp. Well, now he must pull

himself together, show a blank face to all the world, and drain the filthy potion to the dregs. What an idiot he had been last June: when he said good-bye to his young wife, and got into the train that was to carry him back to this very camp, away from the clean and cheerful railway platform of Charlottenburg, he had had the feeling as he got into the compartment that he was going home, to the place where he belonged. His home, indeed! The truth was now made plain. Kroysing and von Roggstroh had been right; he did not belong to this place, he was alien to this sordid assemblage; well, he had but to apply for a transfer, and he would find a way towards a better life. But, alas, it was out of the question. Even in that hour of anger and embitterment he admitted so much. Thick spectacles remained a stubborn fact, and no man should walk wantonly into danger. He was and he remained condemned to toil in the A.S.C. And like a man condemned, he had to cling to the railing as he clambered up the slippery wooden steps to the orderly room. He sweated beneath his heavy knapsack, and his neck was stiffened by the rain.

Next morning he reported sick. He had spent a night of strange sensations, alternating gusts of heat and cold, and strange imaginings. He was certainly feverish; on examination, his temperature proved to be a hundred. That was nothing very serious, as the Assistant M.O. observed; however, as Bertin was an educated man he had better lie up for a day. "Ah," thought Bertin, as he stood up stiff and straight; "if I had been a waiter or a compositor, and run a temperature because I had a shock, I should have had to go out into the wet and do my job and catch my death of cold before I was sent to bed." Health and sickness appeared to depend on the class to which a man belonged. Comrade Pahl would certainly say so.

During that whole day, which he spent in resting, sleeping, and writing, he had to explain to his wife that his application



had been refused—during that whole day in the clean and peaceful domain of the hospital sergeant, Schneevoigt, it did not occur to him that such an idea had never come into his mind before. Something within him had been plainly set in motion—unfortunately not quick enough to keep him from further injury. For the smaller predatory beasts possess a good scent even in the primeval jungle of human society, and drop with precision on a wounded quarry.

## CHAPTER II: INTIMATIONS

IN outward aspect, during the next few weeks the weary round went on as usual, monotonous and inevitable. Day after day, before sunrise, the working parties set forth, stiff and numbed by the incessant rain, to lay field railways—sometimes in the marshy undergrowth near Ornes, and sometimes in the gullies and along the slopes of the Fosses wood district. The French gunners were always on the watch for them, and sent over a shell or two that burst, dusky-red, in the dim light of dawn; and one morning, beyond Gremilly, Private Przygulla of the A.S.C. was carried away with a great gash in his belly—not thirty yards from where Bertin lay flat on his face in the mud. And a little later, in Fosses wood, they watched a German aeroplane hurtle downwards and crash; after a frantic ten minutes' run, the A.S.C. men pulled a dying airman out of his seat, his back riddled with bullets; and they had hardly hidden him behind the nearest ridge, together with his observer and the most important parts of the equipment, when a French shell set the great crippled bird ablaze—these were exciting hours in the long succession of grey and ghastly weeks. Inexorably the days shortened; the darkness, cold, and damp, and desolation gripped those toiling men and ate their hearts away—they seemed to hang like strengthless flies in the net of mighty spiders, grey against the grey. When, at night, they pulled the blankets over their heads, while the wind whistled through the huts and the smoky stoves, stoked with damp wood, were more productive of coughs than of warmth. Bertin lay among them, a mere toil-worn common soldier like the rest, Lebede, the innkeeper, and Pahl, the compositor,

no longer needed to jeer at him for his obstinate and superior habit of smoking a meerschaum pipe. No, it was long since Private Bertin had smoked a meerschaum pipe, metaphorically speaking: on the contrary. So much became clear when Sergeant Kropp seized an opportunity to try to put him down.

Since the beginning of October, the park command had issued an order that every man on the outside working parties should be given a day off in rotation, so that the men might have some leisure to keep themselves and their belongings in decent condition. Lieutenant Benndorf insisted on the strict observance of this order, much to the annoyance of the men on duty inside the park and their N.C.O.'s. One morning, when Sergeant Kropp, an ill-conditioned little peasant from the Uckermark, found Private Bertin asleep in the hut while everyone else was on duty, and announced that he would report him for evading duty, Bertin, in the consciousness of his innocence, laughed. Kropp stamped out of the hut; Bertin turned over and went to sleep again.

That day, the twelfth of December, was memorable not merely to Bertin but to the whole world. When, after washing-up was done, the daily army bulletin was put up on the black tarboard orderly-room wall, an ever-increasing crowd of men gathered in front of it, and read out the rather illegibly mimeographed text in an excited undertone; it contained the word "peace." Germany had made an offer of peace! Germany had beaten off her enemies for two and a half years; a week or ten days ago, Bucharest, the capital of Rumania, had been occupied by German infantry (with the assistance of Fritz Bertin, the fusilier); and such a step towards the deliverance of Europe could now be taken without fear of misinterpretation. Bertin, his cooking-pot dangling from his hand, and vainly straining his short-sighted eyes, listened, asked eager questions, and stood speechless. This . . . this was the greatest day of his life, he could almost hear the world's sigh of relief as he



sighed too. Alas . . . only until he had grasped the text of that Imperial message. For that announcement lacked the essential words by which the feeblest intelligence could judge whether it was serious or not: the restoration of Belgium and compensation for damage done. It might be imagined that, given goodwill on both sides, such details could be left to settle themselves. The main thing was to get the enemy to the negotiating-table. Now Private Bertin was certainly not devoid of good will; but his hopes withered and fell away like fading leaves. . . . Again and yet again he read that notice, but could discover not one single expression which the enemy Powers could take up without humiliation. After the first shouts of "Think of that now!" interspersed with a few more cynical comments such as "Just you wait and see!" the A.S.C. men, still talking in undertones, had almost all slouched away. A Bavarian gunner from the park, a bandy-legged man with a peakless cap over one ear and a cigarette stuck behind the other, turned to Bertin as he departed and said in broad Bavarian: "That's no bloody good to us, chum, is it?" And after peering about him to make sure that no N.C.O. or clerk was within hearing, he concluded by asking what those b—— in Berlin thought they were going to get out of a peace offensive of that sort.

Plunged in thoughts that were none too pleasant, Bertin departed also. The white notice on the orderly-room wall looked desolate in the pallid daylight. And when, as evening fell, the men of the Fosses wood party clattered into the huts and fell into loud and heated disputes over the news, the same misgivings and disgust appeared in a slightly altered form. Bertin, struck by this unanimity between Bavarians, Berliners, and Hamburgers, began to be surprised at his first sense of exultation. He noticed Pahl's eyes upon him, and Karl Lebede's questioning looks. Concealing a certain embarrassment, he told them of Kropp's crass behaviour; the fellow would get properly turned down when he put in that report. Pahl and Lebede

exchanged a glance. It was on the tips of their tongues to tell him to follow up the affair at once, and let the park orderly room know what had happened; but they did not. Their friend Bertin was the kind of man who learned only from experience. And he appeared actually to have been taken in by this lunatic offer of peace.

As he departed to write another letter home, the two A.S.C. men were left facing each other at the narrow end of their table, near the window, now darkening in the early December dusk. The hut was filled with the muffled din of many men, the reek of their tobacco, and their whispered talk. Tunics and drill jackets were hanging up to dry between the bunks, and tarpaulins were stretched across the ventilators. Countless handkerchiefs, freshly washed, were drying on the long black stove-pipes that ran at sharp-angled turns through the building and reached the open air through the windows, their joints carefully plugged with sacking. Lebede was wearing a brown woollen vest and green-striped slippers, Pahl was in shoes and a grey woollen jacket. They looked exactly like fathers of families intent on finishing some small job before a holiday: Lebede was mending a pair of socks, and Pahl answering a letter.

But Lebede wanted to ask Pahl's advice, and Pahl, as usual, was very ready to give it. There was a good deal on his mind too. Lebede began: The Böhne working party had that day begun a new line that was to lead up to the ruins of Chambrettes farm. (For the past two or three weeks Pahl had belonged to Corporal Nāglein's squad, which was posted in another and less exposed gully in Fosses wood.) The intention was to conceal two fifteen-centimetre howitzers among that broken ground, and then build the inevitable narrow-gauge railway to serve them. And who should turn up during this operation? Sergeant Süssmann. With his little ape-like face and darting eyes he came slouching out of the emplacements behind Poivre ridge, on that day of all days! Often and often had Bertin

inquired after him and his lieutenant among the Sappers from Ville, and to no purpose. Now here he was, and the game had taken another turn; very talkative and cheerful, and telling everyone how they had escaped from the Douaumont mess without much damage, but since then had managed to get themselves uncomfortably wedged in on the extreme right wing of Poivre ridge rather near the Meuse. They were pounding the French with heavy mines, as the lines lay pretty well on top of each other; all the communications to the rear had been shifted towards the west, and they did not even get their letters, as they used to do, through Montmédy. So Lieutenant Kroysing wanted Bertin to do him a service: to forward a letter and a parcel, the former to the court martial office at Montmédy, and the latter to a post-office within the German frontier. "You see how it is, my boy? For the time being, the Herr Lieutenant doesn't want to put anything in the field post bearing the name of Kroysing. Folks tend to get suspicious when they've nothing better to do." He would convey Lieutenant Kroysing's thanks on the earliest opportunity. "He's the decentest chap you could wish to meet, is my lieutenant: even if you've only stood him a fill of tobacco, he never forgets it." He himself, Süssmann, would be putting up an extra stripe on the Kaiser's birthday—all Kroysing's work.

So saying, he produced two packages from his knapsack, one small and flat; one large and round and soft; the latter, he explained, being young Christoph Kroysing's effects. "Well," said Karl Lebede, "I don't mind confessing I felt a bit odd—just a trifle uncomfortable, as you might say. It was in Chambrettes farm that young Sergeant Kroysing spent every day and night of his last few months. And lower down on the right, just when we were packing up those two long-barrelled guns—French guns they were, I think—Bertin promised to forward his letter. And now Süssmann fetches up, starts wagging his tail, and wants to let Bertin in for more trouble. This looks like being a



nasty business that isn't going to do any good to anyone. Of course, being a polite man, I didn't say so, and I took the parcel. . . ." "Where is it?" asked Pahl. "Wilhelm, you'll lose an eye one of these days, you're so nosy. Well, when he'd gone, I began to wonder. What would you have done?" "I wouldn't have touched it." "Why not?" Wilhelm Pahl lowered his chin and looked his friend in the eyes. "Because Bertin oughtn't to be always messing about with officers. He doesn't want any encouragement to make a fool of himself." "Well, I says to myself in the end: Every sausage must have an end, and this sausage was long enough. Could the stuff in that parcel do anyone any good? Not the parents, it would break their hearts; I heard an old dame lift up her voice at such a sight in 1914, and I can hear her still. And folks in Nürnberg won't be any poorer if the thing gets lost. Lost in the post—that was going to be the fate of that parcel. No; it's no man's business to pass on such pestilential stuff. So I crawled down into the dugout that used to be the cellar at Cham-brettes farm. It was afloat with rain-water and dung. The stink of that place, Wilhelm—I don't envy the gunners who've got to set up house there. Well, as I made my way through the swamp, I caught sight of two eyes. I naturally thought of young Kroysing, but not seriously, for I don't happen to have been born a superstitious man. Well, if I knew anything about a beer cellar, there was a cat glaring at me from the upper shelf. I flashed my torch at it, and sure enough it was a cat; a grey tabby, bloated by a diet of rats, or just about to kitten. 'Now keep quiet,' I said to it; 'just you look after this little lot'; and I shoved the soft parcel between the mattress and the wall. And then when I got outside I pumped some air into my ribs again. Well—was I right?" "Quite right," said Wilhelm Pahl. "But as regards the papers, perhaps our post orderly . . . ?" Wilhelm Pahl gnawed his underlip. "We'll fix it this way, Karl. The day after tomorrow ten fathers of families are going on Christmas leave. . . ." "Bless my soul! Is

Christmas as near as that? I dare say peace will be declared while they're sitting round the home fires, and they'll never get back to their old friends Lebede and Pahl." Wilhelm Pahl ignored this flippancy. "One of them is Comrade Naumann Bruno. He can be trusted, and he'll drop the letter into the post-box on Montmédy station. And no one will be any the wiser." Karl Lebede reached out a freckled hand. "Right," said he: "then let's get along and see about it."

Naumann Bruno (everyone put his Christian name last, to distinguish him duly from the fool of the company, Naumann Ignaz) was the company barber, and his little billet was quiet, warm, brightly lit, and fragrant with almond soap. On a chair sat Sergeant Karde, who had just had his hair cut. This Leipzig bookseller, whose little business was now at a standstill, and who must certainly be worried about his wife and child, just like any other worker, was much respected by all decent members of the rank and file for his solid and kindly humanity, although politically he sided with their enemies, the "German Nationals" as they were called. As the pair came in, Karl Lebede made a humorous remark or two that provoked a laugh from Karde as he eyed his haircut approvingly in two mirrors. Then Karl Lebede sat down to be shaved; Karde buckled on his belt, counted out twenty pfennigs, saluted, and took his leave. "Shut the door, Bruno," said Lebede in a matter-of-fact voice. "Let me present you with a tangible proof of my confidence; I want you to drop it in the letter-box tomorrow at Montmédy station. I'll put it in this drawer. And now show Comrade Pahl your old woman's letter, and the bit of newspaper in which she wrapped up that fine new badger shaving-brush. Yes, Wilhelm," he said to the astonished Pahl, "in case you haven't noticed it, surprises always come in pairs, and I've had this one for a day or two."

The barber's smooth and ruddy face quivered, though he did not for a moment distrust Pahl, commonly



known in his company as Liebknecht. "The old woman shouldn't have done it. Every evening I mean to burn the thing and then I think it would be a pity." He opened a dilapidated cardboard box, took out a carefully folded letter, and read out a passage in an undertone: "There is a good deal of news but nothing much goes on here. I mostly keep my room. The country is pretty bare by this time, but I'm always on the lookout to pick up a bit of food. There's a good deal going on, one way and another. What do you think of Georgie's blethering? I'm packing it round the shaving-brush, it won't half make you savage." Pahl sat listening, wondering why on earth this harmless fragment of a letter should be read aloud. He took it from Naumann's hand. Silently the barber bent over him, and drew connecting curves with the end of his razor blade between two pairs of words. There emerged—and Pahl formed them with his lips—the words "Zimmerwald" and "Kienthal." He looked up abruptly. "Jesus," said he.

The others had already caught the allusions; in the previous and the present year, the leaders of Socialist minorities in many lands, individuals, and the representatives of little groups that rejected the policy of their majority parties in supporting the war, had met in the Swiss towns, Zimmerwald and Kienthal. Among them had been a German, Georg Ledebour, member of the Reichstag, a man of some age and weight, and respected even by his political enemies. The two most dangerous apostles of discontent, Liebknecht, also a member of the Reichstag, and Rosa Luxemburg, the authoress, were no longer allowed to leave the country, or were actually in jail. In 1915 the assembly had already appealed to the working classes of all lands; for them, the World War was an inexorable consequence of the economic tension and the greed of conquest that formed the very essence of the capitalist world order. The German newspapers of every colour had poured scorn upon these "Zimmerwalders" for their fatuous refusal to face facts; while the surrounding lands of Europe

were locked in a life-and-death struggle, as the meanest peasant could perceive, these café politicians, unperturbed by the world storm, proclaimed that war or peace made but little difference to the workers. Little chance as they had against capitalism in peacetime, they had even less in war, because war battered on the fathers and sons of the working classes; so—Down with the war! “Tell that to the French!” exclaimed the German newspapers; and “Preach that to the Germans!” exclaimed the French journals. And the war went on.

Barber Naumann then slowly opened the drawer of the table in which he kept his razors. He picked out a small sheet, faintly yellowed and quite inconspicuous; it read: “Where are the blessings you were promised at the outset of the war? The real consequences of the war are already only too plain: misery and privation, unemployment and death, starvation and disease. For generations the costs of the war will paralyse the strength of the nations, and destroy all that you have fought for and won to ennoble your lives. Spiritual and moral desolation, economic catastrophes and political reaction—such are the fruits of this horrible international conflict, as of all those that came before it . . . .”

Pahl’s face grew grey. His ugly features seemed almost transfigured by emotion, and he laid his hand upon his heart, as it was brought home to him that somewhere in the world, in free Switzerland, such things could be thought and said and printed. Humanity was not sunk in viewless night. A spark of truth still glimmered. . . . Involuntarily Naumann bent over Pahl’s shoulder and read the lines as well. . . . “Hurry up,” he said, in sudden apprehension; “someone may come in at any minute.” Lebede silently tucked a towel into the front of his woollen vest, and moistened his face. “Let him read it by himself, old boy,” he said; “we know it by heart.” Naumann came over to him, lathered his face, and said to Pahl: “We’re fools to take such a risk. Well, shut the drawer, and the door, and read it to yourself. Slip it inside the *Lokalanzeiger*.”

Pahl did so; and the perilous sheet covered Edmund Goldwasser's report of the Crown Princess's visit to the Cäcilie Hospital at Potsdam. And he read on: "In this intolerable position . . ." He could see them all seated round a table, representatives of the tortured nations, their faces dark and lined with thought, discussing their declaration of war, for which they were ready, one and all, to go to jail; they declared war on national hatred and national madness, against all who would prolong the war, and they appealed to the oppressed classes in every land to reach across the frontiers and come to each other's aid. They pledged themselves to take up the struggle for peace, and a peace that renounced any violation of popular rights and popular freedom. They proclaimed the self-determination of nations as the inexpugnable foundation for their policy, and they called to the subject classes to rescue civilization, and to fulfil their highest duty by fighting for the sacred cause of socialism in an implacable class-warfare, as courageously as they had faced their so-called enemies since the war began.

Outside a man stood elaborately polishing his boots, having plainly stepped off the duck-boards that alone made the camp yard negotiable, into the reddish mire which covered it inches deep. Pahl quietly folded up the paper, and slipped it under his arm. "Let me take it away," he said to Naumann. "I'll be careful of it." "You can keep it," replied the other; "I'll be glad to get rid of it." The door opened and admitted Sergeant Kropp. He looked peevishly round the room as he noticed two men there ahead of him. But Pahl observed genially that he would come again later, he had more time than the Sergeant, and tomorrow was also a day. "You can find your way home alone, Karl," he said, and departed. Outside, he stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. He had heard a call and understood it. The sky was overcast, and the stars were hidden; but the stars were there. Just as surely would the victorious forces of reason advance



behind the struggling workers, and the welfare of the nations, rightly understood, was inseparable from that victory. Yes, the time had come to act. If the reports in the orderly room were right, and men fit for active service could no longer be claimed for industrial work at home, a man must make a little sacrifice, and unfit himself for service. A couple of toes or a finger—very carefully staged, so as to hoodwink the military authorities. . . . The laws of the ruling class had a thousand eyes, but intelligence was Argus-eyed, and winged as well. Warmth seemed to flood his veins from the newspaper that he held against his heart. He longed to run and dance and shout and sing: “Ye nations, the time is at hand . . . !”

A little later, as Karl Lebede, shaven and glistening, came into the hut, he announced with a grin that Kropp had only wanted his hair trimmed so as to present a neat appearance before the quartermaster next morning when he brought in Bertin for punishment. The folly of man was unfathomable, and never-ending in its variety.

### CHAPTER III: AN AUTHOR TAKES UP HIS PEN

THENCEFORWARD events sped past like the vivid fleeting visions of a dream. Uneasiness was in the air when after dinner two little groups of transgressors were lined up outside the hut of Quartermaster Grassnick: on the left Sergeant Kropp, very neat about the head, Private Bertin of the A.S.C., and close beside him, very straight and stiff, his platoon-Sergeant, Schwerdtlein, to testify, if needed, to the accused's good character; on the right, Sergeant Böhne, in whose platoon his friend Nāglein had gleefully discovered two shirkers—Karsch, the deaf carpenter, and Vehse, the little upholsterer—who, while bringing up ammunition, had slipped into a dugout to avoid the bursting shells, and had there been found by their comrades on the return journey. This was Karsch's second offence. He had an incurable horror of these iron birds that crashed into men's entrails. Böhne shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, twisted his moustache, and raged inwardly at Nāglein, who was making a report with a consequential air, instead of leaving the affair to him.

All round the camp the skyline muttered and rumbled; but the flicker in the distance came no longer from German gun-flashes but from bursting enemy shells. Something was happening—what it was no one could guess. And yet—what said his old saw?—appetite grows with eating. The French intended to answer the Kaiser's peace offer with bayonet-thrusts. And as their artillery now had the upper hand, they had no doubt of reaching their objective—a line running from Poivre ridge through Fosses wood and

Chambrettes farm as far as Bezonvaux, a shortened front cutting across the Meuse heights, the advantages of which certain gentlemen in Pierrepont, members of the German General Staff, would very well appreciate. The attack rolled slowly forward; when it came to a head, the inhabitants of camps and ammunition parks would perhaps become aware of something: until then, all was peace.

It was about half-past two when Quartermaster Grassnick appeared in the door of his well-appointed hut, which was roofed with grey waterproof canvas. Bertin eyed him dispassionately as he approached: the warm fur waistcoat under the open tunic, which Krawietz, the company tailor, had turned out for him at a cost of next to nothing, the stylish riding-breeches, the high peaked cap, the monocle and the red plump face. A wry quizzical grin of satisfaction revealed that "Panje of Vranje" had been far from displeased to note that Bertin was in trouble. In the same doorway appeared the company commander's bulldog, a portentous animal with huge breastbone and tremendous legs, light brown with a white shirt front; it was generally unpopular because it accounted for two men's meat ration, and as a result was never allowed out alone for fear it might find its way into a saucepan. The quartermaster was in high good humour. All the world knew that he was going on leave next day and would be away over the New Year. So instead of consigning the two truants to the cells, he read them a rasping lecture, told them they were traitors to their comrades, and sentenced them merely to an hour's punishment drill in full equipment. Böhne beamed with relief; Bertin felt inquisitive. When Kropp had stuttered out his report, he opened his mouth to explain, but, with an even more quizzical smile, Herr Grassnick held up his hand. "Pray spare yourself the trouble. Three days' solitary confinement. Dismiss!" Bertin swung round. Sergeant Schwerdtlein, when the quartermaster had disappeared, stepped up



to him and said in an undertone: "You can appeal, but not till afterwards." Bertin thanked him and said he would think it over. If he had to be locked up in any case, he need not decide for a few days whether he should appeal. Shaking his head, Schwerdtlein departed. He could not understand this obvious injustice, nor the victim's composure.

Sometime in May or June—he could not remember exactly when—Bertin had done a very silly thing that he would certainly not do now. The quartermaster had condescended to play a game of chess with him, and Private Bertin of the A.S.C. could not resist the temptation of checkmating him at the third move. He knew quite well that he was outraging the structure of the universe, but he could not resist the impulse. The quartermaster's sentence had been in settlement of that old reckoning. Grassnick thought, no doubt, that he had hit him hard; but he was wrong. To Bertin life was more comfortable among the soaked and shattered stumps of Fosses wood than in the heat and turmoil of the camp, and more comfortable still within the four walls of a cell.

On the ridge of high ground that abutted on the camp, the men for the loading parties lined up, a damp and weary throng, who had just poured out of the park. Franz had launched a heavy bombardment on the right wing, from Poivre ridge to Louvemont; his shells were now dropping on the road to Ville, on Caures wood, and on the ruins of Flabas. From the boundaries of the camp could be seen the spectral columns of earth and smoke that uprose after the explosions. The A.S.C. men observed them without misgiving; that was the extreme range of the enemy guns. They could not carry as far as the park, which contained forty thousand assorted shells.

For twelve hours Private Bertin of the A.S.C. slept, almost without moving, in the cell where the guard had locked him in, with his overcoat and blankets. As he lay,

the nose stood out peaked and pointed from the haggard face, the lips were drawn and bitter, the narrow chin half hidden under the grey blanket; he had been freezing unawares all night long. He had withdrawn into his inner life; when he awoke his bones were stiff, but he himself was solidly refreshed and in the mood for meditation. It was better to lie still for a while, and freeze and think, and reflect on himself and his surroundings, instead of getting up and washing and talking to his fellows. Here he was, stuck like a scrap of muck, on which any boot might stamp. But if this boot belonged to the lowest of human organisms, far better to be a scrap of muck, swarming with independent maggots, in the shape of thoughts. The walls of the cell, the locked door, the hard bunk, and the pale light of dawn now creeping through the open window invited him to self-communing. A sheet of oiled paper had been nailed over the window-frame to take the place of glass. But he would have had to get out of his blankets and climb on to his bunk, to prolong the welcome darkness; and that Bertin was not inclined to do. He would get up when he heard the clink of cans as the men went to fetch their coffee. No, this durance was a gift of the somewhat shabby gods that watched over the destinies of white men at the end of 1916—this excellent dispensation of injustice, vengeance, cold, and solitude must be used to purge his meditations. Hitherto he had been stumbling about like a young puppy, imperilling himself or annoying others. It was time he awoke, and marked the movements of fate. Kroysing and Roggstroh were right, he was living in an alien world and he must change it—how, he must now consider.

The squad on guard, the first squad of the first platoon, tall men all of them, were sitting at breakfast. They invited Bertin to help himself. They looked uneasy, and Bertin listened. The artillery fire had never been so intense since the heavy fighting of May or July. Above the boom of the bombardment could be clearly heard the crash



and roar of the enemy shell bursts. But the large and comfortable figure of Corporal Büttner radiated an imperturbable calm. "Your squad," said he, "has sent over some things for you, which I had better not know about."

Under a bench stood the lid of Bertin's cooking-pot, neatly packed with the evening ration of the day before, butter and cheese, his notebook with its oil-cloth cover, and five cigars in a paper bag. "Ah," thought Bertin, with a thrill of pleasure, "good fellows, they haven't forgotten me." If he asked for something to read, or his pipe, Corporal Büttner did not notice. Hot coffee was very welcome to a man who had been freezing all night. Though what, indeed, did that matter? There were thousands of men who would have given years off their lives to freeze for twelve hours undisturbed. The hut was heated, and a pleasant warmth pervaded the whole ramshackle structure of planks and pasteboard. There was nothing to distinguish the prisoner now at breakfast from his jailers.

Back again in his cell he decided to smoke a cigar, and he watched the blue smoke curl upwards towards the window. It was a company cigar, rather suggestive of dried cabbage leaves; still, it was a cigar. There was a good deal of excitement outside, and the sound of hurrying feet; no one was likely to look up at the little cell window. He stretched himself, closed his eyes, and had time to breathe again as though he were alone in the world. The sinister forces that had seized him receded and grew dim. A little loss of freedom seemed to be an aid to self-discovery.

As he thus blinked lazily into vacancy, a figure rose up before his inner vision: a tanned face under a peaked cap, brown and eager eyes, and shoulders slightly bent. It kept its left arm hidden; and in its button-hole the ribbon of the Iron Cross shone as though in a sudden flash of sunshine. And the dark shape still hovered above him though Bertin could see the seams of the planked wall at its back. And Bertin silently addressed the phantom: "Kroyding," he said, "I have done all I could. I am but a

louse, as you know, a common private in the A.S.C., and since I turned on that water-tap, I am a marked man. I found your brother, I gave him all you left, we read your letter, and Eberhard will see that justice is done to you, be very sure of that. You must leave me in peace. If there ever was a helpless soldier, it is I. I can't write to your mother, can I? That is your brother's job; and I can't write your uncle either." "Write!" retorted the figure in a noiseless echo. Bertin marked the tanned, gaunt face, narrow cheeks, curved forehead, level eyebrows, long eyelashes, and steady brown eyes. The wolves had set upon him, and brought him down; and now he lay buried in the marshy woodland near Billy. It was natural enough that he should reappear. Write? Why not? He had plenty of time. His earlier mishaps he had fashioned into little images, carved in ivoried words; twelve of them were now to be bought and read. That indwelling spirit never found rest until he exorcised it by the spell of words. He had a writing-block and a fountain pen, of memorable origin, which one of his friends, probably Strauss the shopkeeper, had put in with the cigars. "So it was thus I was fated to use it," he thought, and shuddered.

Bertin put on his overcoat, wrapped one blanket round his body and legs, laid the other round his shoulders, and leaned against the hut wall, with his feet on his bunk, thus making a desk of his knees. Beyond the peak of his cap the chill daylight fell upon the white square of paper. His left hand, holding the block, reached for a glove, which he put on. And he began to write the story of the Kroysings. He wrote all through the morning; until his squad sent him in some dinner; he hid his work, ate his stew, washed his cooking-pot, waited till the door was locked, climbed on to his bunk, wrapped himself up again, and wrote. Inspiration had come upon him. Line upon line slid from his subconsciousness into his pen, and the glorious fever of creation coursed through his veins—that outward urge through which an individual

ceases to be an entity and becomes the instrument of compelling forces which the spirit has prepared within him. He cursed the falling dusk, put his work aside, to which he had as yet given no title, and knocked to be let out.

Hildebrandt, the tall blacksmith, came to open the door—a Swabian from Stuttgart, a friend of his since Küstrin days; they had had many an excellent talk together. “My lad,” said he, “there’s something up over yonder.” Bertin did not mention that he had heard nothing; he had been living in months now dead, beneath Chambrettes farm, in the gully of the great gun-emplacement. The guard-room was noisy with excited talk; it was a relief to see Corporal Büttner’s calm and comfortable form outlined in the doorway. The batteries were still firing steadily, and the rattle and roar of the drumfire had not diminished. Franz was certainly going to attack, perhaps that very night, perhaps next morning. The whole district was alive with rumour; batteries incessantly rang up to see if the lines were still intact; many, which had been connected in the morning, were silent since midday. With the loss of two horses and three drivers, some limbers of field artillery had made their way through Ville, and were now loading up in the field-gun park, the most sheltered and secure position in that whole expanse of country. Hildebrandt had had a talk with them; they had pretty well got the wind up at the prospect of having to make that double journey once again, to keep the batteries supplied. Many a man’s death sentence had already been pronounced. No matter; the limbers were loading, and the limbers would return. The loading parties were just moving out of the park, columns of rusty figures swathed in tarpaulins, to keep off the persistent drizzle. Bertin was fortunate to be under arrest. Under Hildebrandt’s escort he made his way to the latrines.

There were wild rumours of French sallies from Douaumont; the whole neighbourhood was under heavy fire. That day Franz was going to get back a solid bit of his own land,



how much no one knew. (A great deal, in fact. All the right bank of the Meuse that had been so dearly bought between March to September—all the woods, now wrecked, Chauffour, Hassoule, Vauche, the Hermitage, Caurrière, and Hardoumont wood, and all the valleys.) Little Vehse came in just as Bertin was leaving. "There's the reply to your peace offer," he said gloomily in his broad Hamburg speech, and his eyes revealed how deeply he had hoped. He had married young, and in February or the beginning of March, he was due to go on leave, and he was then going to paper his bedroom. A few days ago he had been discussing colours with Bertin. He preferred green, but green papers were often poisonous, and as his wife was delicate, it might affect her lungs.

Bertin pleaded with Hildebrandt for a candle, and was given one. The door was locked once more, again he heard the surge and thunder from behind Caures wood. He would not shut out the din of that distracted world. Then he pushed the window-frame in front of the ventilator and set to work. The candle would last for a time, though his eyes would be certain to suffer. This war was an unwholesome business, and half a degree more astigmatism might tell in his favour at future inspections.

At first he made no progress; then the knot loosened and the thread ran on. He brought his friend of a day, Kroysing, to life again, at least while his vision lasted. He did not at all look forward to telling the story of his death, though he meant to reach that point before he stopped. And he did reach it. Next day he would describe the delight of the sergeant, the captain, and the battalion commander at Christoph Kroysing's death. There is an old Hamburg saying that one man's owl is another man's nightingale. He must invent other names for Feicht and Simmerding and Niggl, not forgetting the excellent Glinsky. For that day he had done enough; his eyes were aching, and he had sat still so long that he began to freeze in the chilly night air. His supper was brought in, he smoked a cigar,

and he lay in the darkness quivering. Gradually his mind relaxed; he warmed himself by breathing heavily, and went to sleep without realizing that in the darkness the crash of the explosions was coming gradually nearer.

"They're firing at Thil wood!" "They're firing at Flabas!" "They're bombarding Chaumont!" "They'll be getting us soon!"

Excited voices filled the guardroom. Bertin came in fresh and freezing from his cell; he had slept soundly and dreamt of the sandpits of his youth. It was the fifteenth of December. The rain had stopped, the sky was overcast, and Bertin was disgusted to observe that it looked as if it would freeze harder than ever.

No. 1 Company was very nervous, so much was quite clear. And it seemed probable that Grassnick would have to put off his leave for a few days. He was responsible for the lives of four hundred men, who lived among stacks of shells and explosive without the protection of dugouts. For the carpenters and bricklayers would have found no time to put up all those commodious little billets for the gods of the orderly room if they had had to dig cellars for the rank and file. Querfurth, the clerk, a little man with a goatee beard, ran past with terror in his eyes. Corporal Büttner and his squad would have to go on guard again that day. They grumbled, for decency's sake; but of course they were delighted to be relieved from hauling shells for another twenty-four hours.

"I think you'd better hop into your cell again," said Corporal Büttner casually in his boyish voice to Bertin, who was full of eager excitement over his coming ordeal. "But we won't lock you in—who knows what's going to happen?" Bertin glanced at him gratefully and went. Last night, as he went to sleep, he had wondered whether the work that had evolved within his mind had really been successful. Shaking his head doubtfully, he turned over the pages of his manuscript. He could not criticize

what had so lately come to shape outside his mind; the handwriting, and the increasingly cramped lines, bore witness to the force of that inner pulse. Something that had come to fulness had burst forth, and as he read it over, he thrilled once more at the fire of composition.

An author is a lucky man, he thought; he can have his workshop anywhere on earth, put his feet under the table, and write. His own life provides him with his raw material: his sorrows and his joys, his disgust at the world and at himself, his restless visions of a fuller and more rational life. Well, it seemed that he had mastered his profession and his art; and Bertin put his little manuscript into his overcoat pocket. . . . That day he found the world outside more than usually engrossing. He climbed on to his bunk and peered out of the little window; and like a spectator in a side-box he eagerly eyed the performance without. Fresh ammunition trucks appeared to have arrived; the whole company was clattering up the wooden steps to the park, which extended as far as the road to Flabas. To the right stood the orderly room; from the open door came a little group of men engaged in a discussion which he unfortunately could not hear. However, he understood what was going on. In overcoat and cap, booted and spurred, the company commander appeared first, and behind him his batman, Herr Mikoleit, in a peaked cap like an N.C.O., staggering under a huge two-handled portmanteau. Bertin, in his astonishment, bruised his chest against the upper edge of the window; so Grassnick was in fact going on leave. He was followed by Acting-Sergeant-Major Susemihl, sweating with excitement—so he was to take over the company, was he?—a steady police officer from Thorn, who had served a dull twelve years there, to provide for himself and his wife and child. But who was this? Was the irreproachable Acting-Sergeant-Major Pohl also proposing to depart? Hadn't this schoolmaster in civil life delivered lectures in Serbia on a soldier's responsibilities,



and the inexorable claims of duty? And he proposed to bolt?

The Panje of Vranje, his monocle firmly screwed into the corner of his nose, was waving his arms in the direction of Chaumont and Flabas; he was obviously giving Herr Susemihl and his three or four subordinates an encouraging account of the position, and impressing on them that the park was perfectly safe. At this point Sergeant-Major Pfund appeared, an old regular. He had buckled a long sabre round his middle, and his moustache was freshly waxed; but in his hand was an iron cash-box containing the company canteen funds. For the past nine months, at every issue of pay, a few pence were forcibly exacted from each man to provide supplies for the company canteen; and after a stipulated time the surplus profits were to be divided among each and all of the men in that company. Sergeant-Major Pfund made it his business to undertake this distribution. He went to Metz where he was well known, and there bought a few cheap trifles such as pocket-knives, fancy handkerchiefs, and common matches, as was afterwards revealed, and pocketed the rest. "And a pretty good thing he made of it," said Bertin to himself. "And no one, not even I, will dare to say a word, though every man of us could do with a few marks apiece." Bertin then and there resolved to calculate how much the orderly room had accumulated in that box; for the moment his attention was absorbed. (The sum worked out at 1720 marks, on the assumption that only ten pfennigs were withheld from each man every ten days.)

The sky began to clear. Suddenly a shaft of pallid sunlight gleamed on the brass sabre-scabbard and on Herr Grassnick's eyeglass. He proceeded to take his leave with due dignity; down below, the train, tiny yet distinct, now stood in Moirey station, a long line of empty trucks with several passenger carriages, in some of which a blur of white could be seen through the windows. Bertin's

short-sighted eyes could not make out any more details; just as well for him, for the patches of white were bandages, the compartments were packed with wounded from the fighting around Azannes. So the company was to be abandoned. . . . Yonder, from above Chaumont, came a burst of flame and thick clouds of smoke. . . . They were now stamping down the steps and would soon appear on the roadway and again cross his line of vision. Ah, there they were: Quartermaster Grassnick, with his bulldog on a lead; Acting-Sergeant-Major Pohl, fair and bearded; Sergeant-Major Pfund with his cash-box, his sabre outside his overcoat; Mikoleit, the batman, with the portmanteau. They were joined by about twelve exultant leave men, who appeared to have been waiting on the road. Bertin suddenly felt stifled. He must go out, breathe some fresh air, and stand a moment in the sunlight.

In the meantime the men on guard had calmed down; it was not yet one, but for the benefit of the leave men dinner had already been served out to the whole company; a regular feast it had been, beef and haricot beans. The kitchen orderlies had, for once, been punctual. After dinner the guard sat with their prisoners out of doors, and felt the faint glow of the pale sunlight on their faces and their hands. Towards the south-west a captive balloon hung high up in the sky; Franz was spying out the land.

That day the wind was blowing in the east, and carried with it the dull boom of shells and the thud of the defending artillery. Bertin decided to use the daylight and go on writing. He had been meditating on his material, and had sketched out two or three chapters, the scene of one of which was to be the home of Kroysing's parents, in Bamberg perhaps. The news of their younger son's death in action bursts upon a comfortable official household; what he had to convey was the shock of grief, dimmed by the illusions of glory and of victory, which contrasted so painfully with the reality. What name should he invent for poor young Kroysing? As an artist



he must now stand aside from his creation, and adapt and compose it like the subject of a picture.

And while, back in his cell, he sucked at a cigar, and imagined he could feel the sunshine through the tarred roof, he heard a familiar scream above his head. Nearer it came and nearer; the scream became a shriek, and dissolved in a shattering crash. Bertin jumped to his feet; that one had certainly dropped in the park. But surely it was out of range . . . a second crash, a third, and the dull roar of an explosion. A shell dump had gone up! Although Bertin's vision was limited to the road and the hollow of the valley, he leapt on to his bunk. Along the paths and down the steps ran the men of that company in wild and clattering confusion. They were off. Quite right, thought Bertin. Their leaders had gone, and now they were going too. A fourth . . . a fifth crash in the park . . . yells of pain and terror. . . . A ghastly shuddering scream flung him from his bunk, out of the cell, and into the guardroom, where stood Büttner, the manufacturer, pale but unshaken. His men were frantically dragging on their boots; wild shouts of "They've got us!" The next crash was even nearer. "You'd better take your things along with you," observed Büttner, opening the little cupboard. Bertin stuffed his pockets with the belongings that had been taken from him two days before. As he buckled his watch on his wrist, the park was emptying; grey-clad soldiers struggled into the huts; the night was cold and blankets would be needed. Büttner pointed to the open door, in token that his prisoner could join the rest. But Bertin thanked him and refused; they would be safer from shell-splinters where they were, he said. At that moment Corporal Schneevoigt appeared with four stretcher-bearers—three pallid Berliners and a Hamburger—running in the direction of the explosions. That was their duty, and it was for that purpose that they wore the Red Cross armlet; but in the confusion of that rout, it

was good to see some men who were not taking to their heels.

Vast clouds of black and white smoke were pouring out of the park; the dumps of explosive were on fire. There was still a thirty-foot slope between the huts and the bombardment area; but the volumes of smoke would indicate to the French gunners where to aim. Bertin, in the doorway, was suddenly aware of two contrasting movements; up the steps to the orderly room limped the park adjutant, Lieutenant Benndorf, with the aid of a walking-stick; down the slope, grey with dust and mud, trotted Corporal Schneevoigt, followed by two men carrying a bulging tarpaulin slung between them. "Who's that?" came Büttner's boyish voice over Bertin's cap. Old Schneevoigt, a barber by trade, did not answer, his throat made the motions of swallowing, face and moustache were one mass of plastered mud. He pointed grimly towards the columns of smoke. "Little Vehse," replied one of the men. "He's copped it."

Meanwhile Hildebrandt came running up; he had found a few bundles of bandages in the sick quarters, and reported three more dead among the powder dumps: Hein Foth, the dirtiest man in the company, and Wilhelm Schmidt, the farm-labourer—they must both have run straight into the bursting shells—and also a man called Reinhold, blown to bits by a direct hit. . . . Bertin started. . . . Otto Reinhold, such a good fellow. "One of the original lot from Küstrin, if that's the man you mean," said Hildebrandt. Reinhold was in his own squad, and Wilhelm Schmidt, and that dirty ruffian Foth, were men he saw every day of the week. He would certainly have been on duty in the park if he had not been in clink instead. But there was no time for such reflections. Old Schneevoigt had found his voice again; he turned and shouted: "You'd better get out of this! We've left a dozen wounded in the ditches by the road, so mind your step!" and he ran into the sick quarters,

while two more of his men tramped past with another tarpaulin, a brown one this time.

Corporal Büttner lined up his pallid squad, tall men all, but he was a head taller than them all. He told them that, as the company had bolted, they were dismissed and had better look after themselves. They buckled on their belts and rolled up their blankets. Bertin disappeared into his cell. While he hurriedly packed up ration bread and blankets, slipped on his overcoat, and felt in his pockets, he bade farewell to those boarded walls, the bunk, and the window. They had brought him solace and he would not forget them; they had brought him back a sense of what he once had been; and Franz was turning him out too soon. At that moment another tarpaulin was carried past. Through the open door of the hospital hut he could see Corporal Schneevoigt kneeling beside something shapeless and veiled in shadow. . . . A hellish scream, and another crash, in the park again; all ducked and covered their heads; the fumes of the explosion rolled against the window, and shell-splinters or clods of earth rattled on the wall. Then a shrill voice shouted from the orderly room: "Tumble out there! Firemen, forward—those powder dumps must be put out!"

There stood Lieutenant Benndorf struggling with his overcoat. He had already got his right arm into a sleeve, and he pointed with his walking-stick to the huge columns of smoke. The men in the guard-room all started, and looked uncomfortable; it was not their job, but they would have to go and help put out that fire. And Bertin felt suddenly inspired to join them. He would throw away his blankets and march behind his officer into the blazing park. But alas—the lieutenant, now at last in motion, turned his back on the orderly room, hobbled towards the road, turned at the top of the stairway, shouted once again: "Mind those fires are put out!" and limped down the steps to the road. There—Bertin



could hardly believe his eyes—a grey car stood with engine running, and in the back seat was Colonel Stein, flushed and open-mouthed from shouting. The lieutenant managed to hoist himself into the other seat, and even before the door had slammed, the car was off in the direction of Damvillers. Bertin stood dumbfounded; then he slapped his thigh, burst into a laugh, and swung round on Büttner, who had followed him outside. “Well, now we’d better beat it too,” he said in a voice quivering with scorn.

“Report at Gibericy!” shouted a passing telephonist, who had just dashed out of the switchroom. Next moment there was another crash, this time on the crest of the ridge, and the splinters whistled over the guardroom hut. A throng of tall A.S.C. men clattered down the stairway; all that remained of 1/X/20 were evacuating their park.

## CHAPTER IV: A TELEPHONE CALL

"REPORT at Gibercey!" Private Bertin, in overcoat and cap, his bundle under his arm, stood half-way down the stairway to the road, now almost alone, and pondered. There would soon be another crash behind him. Until that moment, he was a man once more, in full possession of his wits: no longer an abject soldier, to be ordered here or there. And he was considering what he had better do. The village of Gibercey, where there was a large unoccupied camp, lay among deep hills. But the road there ran through a broad flat valley, far too exposed to the observant gaze of captive balloons. Where was the most sheltered spot in all that land of dumps and stores? Undoubtedly a certain mill, once used for open-air baths, and later transformed into a field-gun park. Field-gun ammunition, which includes both shells and shrapnel, is the most dangerous of all. And that was the place where men who knew their business had chosen to store ammunition. . . . Bertin ran: down the stairway, along the slope of the road, along the duck-board track, to where the grass mounds masked the various shell-dumps. On the bank of the winding Theinte lived Bombardier Schulz with two men under him, little Strauss and Fannrich, who was lame; just as Bombardier Knappe watched over the siege-gun ammunition in the upper park, though he, unlike the more sociable Schulz, dwelt in solitude. The hut was empty, its occupants had bolted. Never mind, thought Bertin, *j'y suis, j'y reste*; a warm stove, a camp bed, blankets, dry wood, a cooking-pot, and a little store of coffee, sugar, and cigars. A very comfortable little billet; and Bertin sat, grinding

coffee with an empty bottle on a table spread with newspapers.

He listened uneasily to the outer world: a succession of thuds and crashes that seemed to be following the little troop that had just hurried down the hillside. Far better it was to be sitting here waiting for the saucepan to boil; on the right, the men's room, on the left, Herr Schulz's sanctum, cut off by a tarpaulin, and between them a little passage-way, with a small table and a telephone. A pleasant view of the rippling stream, afternoon sunshine, no work to do, and not a soul in sight. . . . Well, they hadn't waited long, thought Bertin, just as the water in the pot began to hiss; and as he shook the coffee into the water, and stirred the thick brew with a wooden splinter, he could see No. 1 Company tumbling down that stairway. Then, as he hung up his tunic beside his overcoat, and an agreeable smell of hot coffee and cigar-smoke rose to his nostrils, he told himself he must be fair. An officer's tunic did not provide immunity from shellfire; besides, Benndorf's limp was witness that he had been hit, and so had old Stein in those legendary days when such exalted personages as colonels were wounded in the open field. There had also been a time when Panje of Vranje sat heroically on his charger until the last man of his column had wheeled into cover. Only nine months ago. Such was the effect of life behind the lines.

Meantime the sky had darkened, and rain began to patter on the roof. Ah, thought Bertin, that would put the fires out, and now no one needed to worry. The more it rained, the better for the war. Four dead, he thought, more than a dozen wounded, officers on leave, or rapidly retreating in a car—surely a rather dubious state of affairs.

However, his name was not Pahl, and the whole pack of them might go to hell for all he cared. Strauss had some books, partly borrowed from Bertin himself. He would read for an hour or so, to distract his thoughts. He eyed the volumes and magazines on the book-shelf beside a heap



of old newspapers. He might indeed look through his own manuscript, but he felt an aversion from anything that smelt of the present, and he finally chose the century-old "Story of the Golden Saucepan," by E. T. A. Hoffmann.

The rain hammered on the roof—steaming coffee, savoured sip by sip, and a timeless world peopled by gnomes and salamanders, ghostly councillors and lovely ladies, and a city of Dresden as it never had existed. Suddenly the telephone buzzed. Bertin started up, shaken out of Hoffmann's dreams. It was not his business to reply. The three men who should have answered were sitting over a game of skat in some dugout on the Flabas road. But Private Bertin was already at the telephone, and had lifted the receiver just as its peremptory buzz began once more. "Hullo, hullo," he shouted; "Steinbergquell Field Gun Park here." "Thank God, sir," Bertin heard the answering voice. "So you haven't all gone west; I heard the place was on fire." "We're quite cheerful," replied Bertin; "it's been a tough time, but we're here still." "Got any ammunition?" asked the voice. "Depends on the calibre," answered Bertin. "Look here, my lad," came the sharp reply. "Have you dropped out of the moon? Don't you know the bore of the German field gun?" So the the telephonists had faithfully plugged a connexion before they bolted; it was certainly a field-gun battery speaking. Then another voice joined in, an officer, as could be clearly heard. "Where have I heard that voice before?" thought Bertin; and he cursed himself for a fool as he answered the officer's questions: the bombardment had destroyed a good part of the heavy ammunition, the company had retreated, and the park command had probably been withdrawn to Damvillers. "*Withdrawn—*eh? And why are you at the telephone?" "I just happened to be here, sir," answered Bertin awkwardly, not knowing what to say on the spur of the moment. How could he have guessed he was talking to Field Guns? And yet he kept on wondering how he knew the voice. "A damned

good thing you were," said the other. "You didn't withdraw anyway. I'll see you get the credit. We'll be along about five or half-past—as soon as we can manage. We're going to hold on here," he heard the officer shout. "One of the lads up yonder has kept his head." "I say," the voice turned once more to Bertin, "haven't we met before? You're the chap with the spectacles from Wild Boar Valley, back in October. . . . What's your name again?" A spark flashed through Bertin's mind. "Is it Lieutenant Roggstroh?" he asked. "It is indeed," replied the lieutenant in a gratified voice. "So you haven't forgotten me, eh? But you must tell me your name." Bertin did so, and asked to be excused if he had done anything wrong; it was just a chance that he happened to be in the field-gun park, and he didn't know the ways of it. "That's all right," replied the lieutenant. "You're the last of the Mohicans, and I'll get you the Iron Cross as sure as we first met in that filthy howitzer emplacement on the Mort Homme. I knew that you weren't a proper A.S.C. man."

Bertin thrilled. But he hastily assured the other that he was merely there because it seemed the safest place, so he hardly deserved a decoration. "Quite," said the lieutenant; "that's just why. Did you ever hear of anyone getting the Iron Cross because he deserved it? See you later, about five or half-past."

Bertin thought he might then venture a question, and asked whether the French had advanced far. "They've got what they meant to get," came the reply; "we shall see the damage to-morrow. So long." And he rang off.

Bertin sat for a moment at the instrument; then he too hung up the receiver. Was he excited by black coffee, or was he trembling with joy? He had thought the atmosphere of that battalion had long since quenched the spark in him; not at all—it had flared up at last. What would have happened if he too had bolted? Four guns and no shells were about as much use as four sewing-machines. They would have had to be hauled out of their



emplacements and sent back, always supposing horses had been available, and would have been out of action for days, and possibly for good. He had saved the situation—by good luck, good sense, and by keeping his head. With a certain grim exaltation Bertin marched proudly round the little room. He was master of a whole ammunition park and all that it contained, not to mention a small river, and he had done his bit to hold the front. Each man in his own fashion. He might quite likely get the Iron Cross. The war would not be over in a day or two. As poor Vehse had said, twenty-four hours before they carried him away in a blood-stained tarpaulin: "That's the answer to the peace offer." . . . Yes, the French showed little appreciation of Imperial prose. . . . Well, with Lieutenant von Roggstroh to back him, he was not going to hide his light under a bushel. And on the Kaiser's birthday, the twenty-seventh of January, Herr Grassnick would once more call out Private Bertin of the A.S.C., and congratulate him in that barrack-room voice. It would be useful for a Kreuzburg Jew to have two sons with the Iron Cross, for Fritz had won it long ago.

When, in the gathering darkness, Bombardier Schulz with the two A.S.C. men, Strauss and Fannrich, opened the door of his hut and came in, he found Private Bertin sitting by the stove and puffing at his pipe in perfect ease and comfort. "Well, you've made yourself pretty well at home," observed Strauss in some astonishment. "What the hell are you doing here?" asked Schulz in equal amazement. "It was the safest place," said Bertin triumphantly; "Franz can't drop any around here." Schulz took off his coat. "Oh, can't he?" said he scornfully. "My good lad, if that damned long-ranger that got busy just a bit before its time this morning had been tipped just a trifle higher, you and the whole bloody show would have been blown to bits." Bertin sat down on the bed. "Really?" he asked in consternation. "You may lay to that," nodded Fannrich, pouring fresh water on to the coffee grounds.

Bertin, rather out of countenance, pleaded that he had at least tried to do what he could. "You made the coffee," said Strauss. "I talked to a battery," retorted Bertin. Schulz swung round and asked abruptly what had happened. "Thank the Lord, you kept your wits about you," he gasped with relief. "I should have been in a pretty sort of a mess otherwise. Now you must get along and report at Gibericy. If Susemihl makes any sort of row just put him on to me." Bertin looked gloomily at the little man with the goatee beard; he wished he could have stayed. "Herr Susemihl won't do anything of the kind," he retorted angrily. "Lieutenant von Roggstroh of the Artillery of the Guard is going to see to that; if he asks for me, by the way, you might explain why I've gone." "He's sure to do that," retorted Schulz. "Did you find any rum?" "I'm sorry to say I didn't," said Bertin, getting up. "Was there any?" "Well, hop it, my lad, or it will be dark before you get back home."

It soon become clear that, in spite of Bertin's confidence, the lively little bombardier knew the world better than he did. When he at last turned up at Gibericy, Susemihl was not at all genial. Bertin did indeed defend himself, and his composure, and the lieutenant's name had some effect. However, the sense of elation with which he had made his way among the tarpaulin tents in the falling darkness slowly faded, and insensibly gave way to a feeling of embittered exhaustion. Maybe he had expected too much, or maybe all the bewildering and senseless flurry of military life had seared too deeply into his soul at last. At Gibericy they buried their dead—a fifth coffin had been added to the previous four—Degener, the grocer, had succumbed to his wounds. In the grey and gloomy light of the shortest day, dazed by rain and wind, the column plodded back to Damvillers, received its orders from the battalion, as represented by a certain irritable and sallow-faced major called Jansch, and marched back to Moirey to dismantle

the Steinbergquell Park; they there piled all the ammunition, planks, trench props, barbed wire, and tarpaulins, dripping with icy slime, on to the lorries, and shifted them all the way back to Damvillers, where they waited for a whole day in draughty billets, and then made their way back to Moirey with the same laden lorries, with orders to lay out the park again on exactly the same spot as before. And this they did.

So they spent Christmas and the New Year in the same hutments out of which they had so recently been shelled. On Christmas Day Herr Susemihl made a speech under a lighted Christmas tree, and babbled about the peace that the enemy had rejected. And then Herr Pfund distributed the presents he had bought in Metz—pocket-knives, fancy handkerchiefs, apples and nuts, and tobacco—of a kind. The fraud that was so manifest from the man's bland gaze and those paltry gifts made the more intelligent in that assemblage feel positively sick. And if the Crown Prince had not sent each of his brave Verdun warriors an enamelled steel case filled with cigars or cigarettes, adorned with a medallion of the donor—that Christmas celebration would have fallen rather flat. But the whole scene faded into unreality as they made their way back into the half-empty hut, where the second section of the company, including Bertin's squad, was now billeted. A few candles were still burning in saucepan lids; the men lay about in silence, or chatted in undertones. That day not a few of the men were absent, and unlike the previous occasions, when men had been passed for active service or claimed for work at home, these absentees would never be heard of any more. They had been part of the life of everyday, men with whom their fellows had quarrelled and made friends again—little Vehse, poor Przygulla, and kindly Otto Reinhold—they now lay in French earth, and were to be replaced after the New Year, this time from Metz. And yet they could not be replaced; their ghostly presences still moved among their comrades



and fellow skat-players, and it was long before they finally dissolved. All that these men suffered, all that the world suffered in the war, slipped through the films of consciousness into the deeper chambers of the soul. Thence, in time to come, it would re-emerge, and demand a reckoning. But on the surface, among men who must meet the incessant claims of everyday, only the conventional and the traditional feelings and emotions are allowed to find expression; family affection, for example. Such mourning, therefore, as there was for the fallen was indirect and included in the general gloom. It was with such undertones of feeling that Halezinsky, the gas-worker, his brown eyes and broad Slavic face moist with tears, looked at the photographs of his wife and children; and only Lebede, the innkeeper, unperturbed and wholly set upon himself, was cheerfully compounding rum punch, the fragrance of which soon began to pervade the hut. "Yes, it's a bad business," he said to Bertin, "but it can't be helped. I suppose it was fated we should smoke Willi's cigarettes." And sitting down on the next bunk to Bertin, he produced the steel case, on the back of which was inscribed: "Fifth Army, Christmas 1916," chose one of the cigarettes, took out his new pocket-knife, and dexterously detached the portrait of the Crown Prince from its embossed setting. "Looks better without it," he observed. "Where all is love Don Carlos cannot hate," he added, quoting a verse of which he did not know the origin, though Bertin did. "Listen to the peace and goodwill outside!"

From the darkness came the thunder of guns. It was Christmas night, a festival that means a great deal to Germans, but they felt they must discipline the indulgence of such feelings by a display of manly vigour; so their guns were scattering steel Christmas gifts, and the French followed their example. Peace upon earth, sang the Gospel; War upon earth, thundered the reality. And so it went on as the year sped to its end. Under a lowering sky the winds grew ever colder, foreboding—said the

weather-prophets—frosts from the east, deep cloud, and starless nights. When Private Bertin took his nightly walk before turning in, and peered with his short-sighted eyes up to the heavens, he could see no glimmer of an early peace. In a few days it would be 1917, four years by the calendar since the war began. Nothing more was heard of Kroysing, and nothing of his Iron Cross or of Lieutenant von Roggstroh: merely gloomy tidings from his wife and his parents. The zest had gone out of life, and even out of soldiering; his business now was to see that he survived, to contract and cramp his soul and make for safety. With bent head he made his way back to the mass, and the protection it afforded. Men were still lavish of their mutual warmth.

## CHAPTER V: PROFESSOR MERTENS RESIGNS

A NEW YEAR afternoon, stark and brief and overcast, brooded over the streets of Montmédy. The French population had gloomily concealed its preparations for the festival; in the officers' clubs and soldiers' canteens were scenes of activity that were all the more cheerful by contrast. Christmas trees from the Argonne were decked with candles, large quantities of diluted alcohol were placed in readiness, and sentimental and martial songs would resound from many German throats. The year 1916 would be brought to a worthy end; it had been an heroic year and would figure as such in the annals of Germany.

Such were the meditations of Herr Porisch, barrister-at-law, in his braided *litevka*, as he looked down with almost maternal feelings on the gaunt drawn face of his superior officer. The judge-advocate lay on the sofa, swathed in rugs up to his neck, and Porisch, with a file of papers under his arm, said as he took his departure: "Anything else I can do for you, sir?" "Yes, Porisch. Please go across to the club and make my excuses for this evening. I should be a wet blanket; tomorrow morning, when everyone has slept it off, I should be glad if the medical officer would look in." Porisch nodded with an air of satisfaction. He felt like congratulating his chief for behaving like a sensible person. However, he merely tapped an orange-covered folder on the table. "Shall I take this away with me?" "No, leave it, Porisch; I may take another look into it. Will there be much gunfire at twelve o'clock?" Porisch blew out his cheeks. "The inspector general has expressly forbidden any waste of ammunition, but the Bavarians, if I know anything about them, will insist on firing blank cartridges. It's an old



tradition of theirs, and people can't be changed by order."

Mertens closed his eyes in agreement; he looked at his subordinate, reached out an arm, and gave him his hand. "True, Porisch, men don't change, or only so slowly that people like us can't wait so long. However, thank you for all your help, and I wish you as good a New Year as is possible under the circumstances."

Porisch thanked him with something like emotion, replied with similar good wishes, and departed. Years later he often said he could still feel the touch of those slender fingers in his substantial grasp.

As the door clicked behind Porisch, Mertens drew a deep breath, and a faint gleam came into his shadowed eyes. A decent fellow, who meant well. But he was a man, and Professor Mertens had had enough of the species. The smooth, flesh-coloured faces of the creatures, and all the apertures that led into the interior of that mask, made him feel sick: the hollowed mouth, the pitted nose, the wedge-shaped slits from which the eyes peered out, to say nothing of the ears, through which came sound but never understanding. It was a dreadful thing when a man had lost his respect for his own race—and lost it so utterly that life, both theirs and his, had lost its meaning. What was he then to do?

A new year was beginning—and the outlook was bleak. New Year's Eve of '14—15 he had spent decorously enough with his Landwehr company, in glittering Arctic snow, his heart full of hopes for peace, the better life that would succeed it. The next New Year, at home on leave, he had listened to much weighty talk, over punch and pancakes, in the quiet candle-lit dining-room of Justizrat Stahr, one of his father's last surviving boyhood friends. The Justizrat's youngest son had just been killed: but in spite of all the grief, what a sense of dignity and calm was born of all these awful losses, what a conviction of the obligations laid on the survivors by this heroic sacrifice of youth. The old man said, as he proposed the New

Year toasts, while the New Year bells rang out from the cathedral, the Memorial Church, and the Churches of St. Matthew and St. Ludwig: "The foundations of this new Reich will have been sealed in very noble blood; I trust our rulers will be worthy of it." And they drank to the Germany, more generous and free, that would arise out of the terrific efforts of the war. And in all this Professor Mertens had believed.

He shivered; he pulled his father's soft-fringed travelling-rug right up to his chin; its dark green hues blended with the deepening drowsy twilight of the room. His beliefs had gone, and so too had his hopes; this one year had sufficed to shatter all his illusions, to destroy that painted veil, which poets had lent all their skill to beautify, and which the philosopher Schopenhauer had so savagely torn to shreds, exposing the agony of the world that it concealed. If Schopenhauer, the Danzig merchant's son, had not been so peevish, hating the kind of man he really longed to be, he might have done much good. As it was, his splendid gifts flashed and vanished in the darkness like the fireworks let off by the Bavarians on New Year's Eve, and his rich phrases left nothing behind them but a void.

Mertens sat up; as he looked round for the electric-light switch, he caught sight of the orange-coloured folder, a lighter patch on the black table; his eyelids twitched, he felt an unpleasant taste in his mouth, and he sank back once more. That was what had begun it all. This wretched little case of Sergeant Kroysing had given the impulse—faint indeed, but enough to rouse so fastidious a soul, already conscious of the prickings of doubt. By now, however, individual cases had ceased to count. The whole scurvy race of man stood ripe for judgment, before the spiritual bar of one for whom the first four decades of life had been a quest for justice and truth, under guidance of a greater man—his father. He had reached the point when he could no longer hear certain words without a desire to cough and a sense of nausea; and especially the



word "nation." Men had ceased to exist; there was only a nation. Man had become absorbed into the herd, and must follow the appointed leader, no matter whom. Aristotle had known this, and Plato too. The *Zoon politikon*; what else did this definition contain but the damnation of man to a vile and irredeemable dependence. Except that for the two Greeks and all their disciples in Europe this fact made manifest how great was the moral obligation laid upon individuals and men of mind to remedy this deplorable state of affairs, and by their wisdom and insight, their human loyalty and goodwill, their patience and self-restraint, to reform and purify humanity. Since the renascence of human reason in the Italy of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the churches and the secular seats of learning had tried to meet this duty; they had inspired religions, reformations, and revolutions—with the result that in this war the peak of our achievement stood in a glare of light; the spirit of Europe was arrayed in uniform; only nations now existed, in the scarlet, black and white of their several self-isolated creeds, and civilization served at the best as a technique of slaughter, as a mask for villainy, as a phrase to justify that insatiable lust for conquest which had made the earth too narrow for Alexander of Macedon, and for which the Romans at least made good by five hundred years of peace and a world civilization. With what should we make good? With our manufacturers and our lies.

Carl Georg Mertens's heart felt like a sodden mass within him; he flung the rugs back and, shivering slightly, walked through the house that the Base authorities had put at his disposal, after ejecting the owner. How long had this house stood? Certainly more than a hundred years. When it was new the great names of Goethe, Beethoven, and Hegel shed their glories upon Germany; Europe stood in the shadow of Napoleon the First, a commander who made good the devastation of his campaigns by political reform and codes of law. And now,

a hundred years later, of these faded conquests nothing survived but moral disintegration, the destruction of all individual values, the deliberate wreck of the moral culture that had revived after the 'Thirty Years' War. He wondered what his father would have said had he lived to see the unanimous glorification of a war by all the intellectuals of Germany; a war of which they knew nothing, and which they busily palliated, falsified, and distorted until it suited their vision of reality. The jurists and theologians, the philosophers and the doctors, the economists and historians, and above all the poets, thinkers, and writers spread betrayal in all they said and wrote; they made haste to say what was not, and to deny what was, callow and ignorant, bloated with pride, making not the faintest effort to find out the facts before they blew their trumpets.

Professor Mertens, a short-sighted man, could see pretty well in the dark. He went to the wardrobe, took out a dressing-gown and some slippers, and wandered through the three rooms that had hitherto served him as an abode, opened drawers and shut them, searched his writing-table for a certain object, found it at last, put it aside, looked in his bedroom for various things that he needed and laid them ready to his hand. In those last few hours of a year that had brought him full foreknowledge, it would be foolish to persist in illusions, even as to his most precious and unshaken values—as for instance his father. The great Gotthold Mertens, scion of Protestant pastors and Mecklenburg officials—would he have rejected the illusions devised by the Fatherland to cover up the lust of conquest in all its naked horror? He would not. Let us not deceive ourselves; at the outbreak of the war, he would have roused the young men and sent them into battle; and throughout the first year, from the deep conviction of his sense of justice, he would have stood forth for Germany in her hour of need and her historic mission; in the second year of war he would have confronted his country with the vast image of her destiny, and steeled

the German heart by appealing to the necessity that knows no law, serving life as he found it, and fighting for the life of a nation. And then, if his son, now come to wisdom, had told him all that he had since discovered—what would Gotthold Mertens have done? In public he would have said no more, in private he would have approached the Imperial Chancellor, once his pupil; then he would have succumbed to the Army Command, and sought comfort in past epochs and dark allusions to the spirit of European legal history, which aimed at the control of human passions, the establishment of civil rights, the protection and security of the peaceful citizen, the improvement of public morals, the enlightenment of the intellect, and the safeguarding of that precious legacy of culture that alone makes life worth living. But he, the son, no longer believed in all these splendid obligations and illusions. A certain sapper lieutenant had opened his eyes, and for the past six months he had learned to use them for himself, with a suspicion that grew more and more intense; and now, when he knew more of what there was to know, what little he did not guess had been provided by that sapper lieutenant and his murdered brother, in the form of two curt reports.

As he looked back on the whole period, he realized that in some strange fashion the books on art that he had read had served to sharpen his sense of reality. The painter's images did not deceive; their respect for reality, their passionate search for form, had made him all the more sensitive towards the prevarications, the lies, and the quarter-truths, with which, in politics as in the war reports, day by day and month by month, men were satisfied. But he was no longer satisfied. When faced by the incredible he had begun to investigate. And now that his eyes had been opened he could not shut them. Then at last he had to face the fact that he had played his part and must retire from the stage. His loathing of the world he lived in was more than he could bear. He



took no interest in women nor the usual masculine enjoyments and distractions. His relation to his father had taken the place of such diversions. He had been fond of travel, but after all the devastations of the war what country could a German visit unashamed? Only music remained to him, and music, the primeval, tragic force behind existence, could not hold him now. Beyond the lit walls of the concert-room began the world of barbarism; through the melodious clamour of fifty fiddles and 'celli came the groans of the fugitives, the dying, and the oppressed, and never again would he see the conductor's raised baton without thinking of the servile herd marching . . . marching . . . marching to the rhythm of every public lie.

When first confronted with the case of Sergeant Kroysing, he had been amazed, and then indignant. Its difficulties had not deterred him; reparation was possible, and though difficult, would not be unattainable. For the past fortnight he had known that it could not be attained. The letters forwarded by the sapper lieutenant had not given him the opening he needed; and then, after the fall of Douaumont, he had vanished, his unit reported him as missing, provisionally, at any rate, the Douaumont garrison having been blown up in October. In the succeeding weeks inquiries were made with some hope of success; he had been definitely identified in a dugout in the Poivre lines; the commandant of the sappers had received his report and knew where he was. But a fortnight ago the new French attack had once more swept across that territory. Since then all trace of him had been lost. The last news was from one of his N.C.O.'s who had seen him disappear into an ice-covered shell-hole during a French bombardment. So Lieutenant Kroysing of the sappers was again posted as missing, this time with an undertone of finality. How could a man survive in an area continually under French machine-gun fire? No, the Kroysing brothers were dead. Justice was unattainable even for an individual within his own nation. What then

could be hoped for as between one nation and another? Nothing. "Nothing," said Judge-Advocate Mertens softly in that twilight room, and he heard the strings of his piano faintly quiver with the echo of that dreadful word.

Professor Mertens now had ears to hear. He no longer believed any assertions or denials. They did but complete the picture. No one lightly admits that the case of one deeply loved is hopeless—and hopeless in the most literal sense of the word. And here the issue was not the life of an individual, but the foundation of all such values—his home and his native land, Germany.

He looked what he was, a scholar, with his smooth keen profile and thin gold spectacles, as he stood and shivered in front of the large black-and-white stone fireplace, where the Base authorities had installed an excellent little coal stove, of a type that now warmed countless German homes. Mertens pulled a chair up to the reddish glow that flickered through the mica panes of the nickelled door, sat down, and spread his fingers to the comfortable warmth. He lay back luxuriously in the low arm-chair. Odd scraps of verse ran through his consciousness, from poets who had been alive and much discussed when he, as a young student, began to sense the joys of knowledge and the intellect. . . . "It will not be long Till neither moon nor stars But only black night stands above us in the sky. . . . The crows are cawing And flapping homewards towards the town. The snow is near at hand. Happy he that has a home still. . . . We listen gratefully to the rustle of the wind. Gleams of sunlight flicker through the leaves, And we look up and listen as one by one The ripe fruits patter to the ground. . . ."

He had no longer any home. Why deceive himself? He might indeed have chosen another day on which to resign, finally and for ever. And yet this was an excellent occasion. No one would disturb him until tomorrow at midday. And if the officers got drunk, as they usually did, not even then. The medical officer took his view

that if anyone really wanted a doctor he sent for him two or three times; behind the lines, as no one had to fear the doctor's bill, officers went sick just to pass the time. Mertens could lay his plans in peace.

The Kroysing case had opened his eyes. Then from somewhere he had heard a rumour that when the Germans overran the defenceless little land of Luxemburg, almost their ally, they spread fire and slaughter. The rumour had often been denied, but C. G. Mertens had been trained to make no statement until he had tested the evidence. Luxemburg was near at hand, and an official car was always at his disposal. He had spent many Sundays and week-days in the invaded area of Luxemburg, first in uniform and then in civilian dress. From the very first he noticed ruins and wreckage that might be the result of operations of war. He began to feel uneasy at the rigid silence of the local mayors and population.

He was obviously taken for an informer. But the crosses in the churchyards told their tale; crude ironwork affairs, with porcelain medallions of the departed, taken from a photograph and libellously ugly. But the majority of these memorials related to the months of August and September 1914. At a little place called Arlon he had met a not unfriendly American professor, who, as a delegate of the American Red Cross, and under the escort of an officer, was travelling through the devastated areas, to collect material for countering the skilful atrocity propaganda with which Reuter's bureau and the English press were bombarding sensible American citizens, and especially the American Jews, who were well disposed to Germany.

After four hours' conversation, from nine at night until one in the morning, Professor MacCorvin convinced himself that Professor Mertens, unlike Mr. Eucken and other German scholars, had remained loyal to the truth. Then he opened his heart. In Luxemburg alone over thirteen hundred and fifty houses had been burned, and more than eight hundred of the population had been shot. In



Belgium and northern France the same methods had led to even worse results. There had been exaggerations in details and particular cases; but in his brain the reports were accurate.

And then, to top it all, Professor Mertens came upon the case of Lance-Corporal Himmke, of the Montmédy field bakery. The man had, while drunk, boasted of his heroic deeds at the burning of the village of Sommeilles during the battle of the Marne. A grandmother, mother, and children, six in all, had taken refuge in a cellar; and all were burnt alive. The accused, in his simplicity, thought to help himself by proving the truth of his assertions and bringing witnesses to show that these things had been done under orders, expressed in terms that left no doubt as to the small value attached to the lives of peasants and their women. Judge-Advocate Mertens agreed, and there was a certain tenseness in his voice and demeanour when he conducted that inquiry. But the officers of Himmke's unit who were to attend the court martial did not take this view at all; and they were backed up by the Inspector-General of Communications as the highest authority; it was not because the man had committed a crime—a crime which indeed they all condemned—that he must be punished, but because he had talked about it, so that his case had become notorious and created a bad impression of German methods of warfare. "All sorts of nasty little games went on, that we know quite well," said one officer confidentially; "but a fellow who talks about them afterwards deserves to be properly put through it." With the result that a few days later, under cover of dusk, shortly after Himmke had appeared to fetch his belongings, he was taken from his Landsturm escort by some unknown cavalymen, and next day he arrived, fearfully mishandled, at the garrison hospital at Montmédy. That—so it was said—was war. From the point of view of legal theory—Mertens smiled to himself as he grew warmer—two strata could be distinguished; the unassailed sanctity of justice, existing objectively, and a

right of retaliation and revenge, ultimately based on the interest of any given unit or group—both elements cunningly blended, so that formally, and in the eyes of the outer world, a façade of European civilization was maintained, though behind it reigned untrammelled all those impulses and passions the restraint of which was the process and purpose of civilization. One kind of justice was dictated by the Bible and the conscience of humanity.

Quite other kinds were permitted by contemporary thought and customs of war. What was rather furtively provided for in the legal practice before 1914, now reigned unashamed and undisguised, and nowhere was there any effective force that dared restrain or punish or abolish it. The recent Belgian deportations were but added evidence, though they had indeed upset public opinion as well as Judge-Advocate Mertens; as were the punishment camp in the Montmédy citadel, the Kroysing case, the U-boat warfare—and all the rest of it. A hundred thousand civilians had been carried off to Germany, there to work for the violators of justice and peace; while neutral states protested vainly against what were no better than slave-raids designed to repair the shortage of labour in Germany; and there were dark rumours of countless dead from shellfire, starvation, and epidemics in the concentration camps. But there were none in Germany to lend an ear. How could all this be squared with the admirable performance of classical drama in the theatres of Berlin, Dresden, and Munich? Well, consistency went for little in wartime. He was oddly reminded of his Aunt Lottchen who used to admire her nephew's spotless study table and then shriek when she opened a drawer. The punishment camp in the citadel had been established as a retaliation and as a means of removing various abuses that certain correspondents had reported in the treatment of German prisoners of war in France. The French government had denied the reports; the German military authorities had blindly believed them, and had had one of the yards in the citadel of



Montmédy covered over with wire about four feet above the ground, and then turned French prisoners into it. They were bent double and were barely able to see each other's faces. In vain had Mertens, who as judge-advocate was not without influence, tried to get this camp abolished. He was told that the French must be taught to treat the Germans decently. The spirit of inquiry had vanished from the world; any demand for proof was met with an ominous insinuating. This old pedant was obviously overworked and would be the better for a spot of leave. Well, he was going at last; the only point was: how should he go? The world had become an abode of horror, and it must inevitably grow more horrible; there was no appeasing or cleansing force now left within the world; no church, no prophets, no moral life whatever—nor the faintest suspicion that without them civilization must die.

The world was besotted in its own self-complacency, and would so remain when the war was over. He must depart; he was a blot upon a world so splendidly united. There was a degree of shame beyond which no man could endure, because it was not provoked by any one event, or by any individual act: it reached down to the fundamental origins of man as a social entity. On that New Year's Eve, in cities great and small, men were passing over from life to death; why should not he pass with them? It was not unmanly to die for the civilization that one loved, to stand and to fall, in silence, without emphasis or fuss. But how was it to be achieved?

He got up, feeling better. He was never easy unless his mind was clear. Then he lit the shaded lamps, the candles on the piano, and the night-light. He drank a little glass of a French liqueur that he kept for visitors, and then another; and enjoyed it. He then collected the various objects he had put aside: he took his black service revolver from his writing-table drawer, and laid out on a silver tray the little tubes of deadly sleeping draught that he had gradually accumulated. In Germany they could be

obtained only on a doctor's order; the French citizen was allowed more freedom, even to compass his own death. As a Prussian officer it was his duty to choose the weapon; if he must die, he must do so with decency and order. But as a man, averse from violence and destruction, the poison was far more to his mind. As his father's son, he had been far too diffident; had tacitly adapted himself to his father's attitude. Should he now defer to others for the last time, and do what custom prescribed? Or should he, in this last human transaction, depart as he thought fit? To ask the question was to answer it. Had he deferred a little less, had he been less considerate son, and less sensitive to the impact of the world, he would have entered cheerfully upon the contest with that world, as so many of his youthful friends had done. Who could say what his life might then have been, nor whether he would now have been facing his ultimate silence? Great was Diana of the Ephesians, and Cybele the Earth Mother; but great too was the solace of music, the mysterious origin of being, expressed in the time-relations of the planetary orbits and in those simple measures and proportions called harmonies by which the unknown could be made manifest. Vibration and gradation were the fundamentals of the universe. According to the physicists, everything could be reduced to movements on the uncharted ether, and its areas of energy, which could themselves transform masses and solids into vibrant, immaterial, and thus spiritual substance. Why not therefore into something nearly akin to music? Why not into music itself? Was there not something behind this marvellous concatenation of quivering air-columns, these vibrating strings, these delicate inter-relations, that went beyond mere sound and air! Surely the mysteries of the higher mathematics became less formidable when approached and interpreted on the basis of music. Physics had a great future, he was sure, though it was a subject of which he understood but little. Einstein the physicist,

whom he had known in Berlin, had altered and dematerialized the aspect of the universe, and his spiritual conceptions had introduced a new fashion of thought, akin to that of Husserl of Göttingen. He too loved music. Perhaps through music and the solace that it brought, man came nearer to a true and ultimate existence, an existence more real than that of flesh and nerves, and through the earthly ear become aware of other stars and better worlds. What was it the poet had called them, pointing to the night sky? "Orbs of shining gold, each sang like an angel." Well, he now knew how he would go; while making music. He would put a sleeping draught on the piano, and sip it quite casually whenever he felt inclined; and so pass into a world of unknown consonances and harmonies, through the portal of those that he loved the most, because, though dark and disunited, they were yet so fresh and glorious—the A-minor quartet of Brahms.

His piano came from Paris; it was an old instrument and some of the notes were a little metallic, but on the whole its tone was soft and good. He mixed his drink with hot water, which he took out of a thermos flask, and stirred it long and slowly, thinking of his nephews, to whom he had left most of his earthly possessions, and of the insignificant library in a little university in some unfrequented mountain country, where, he had spent some happy months, and which, through the priceless legacy of the Mertens library, would suddenly develop into an important centre for the study of legal history and the development of legal theory. His mind ran on at random: he even reflected that with a little more knowledge and skill he might have used this stove to produce carbon monoxide and saved himself from the necessity of taking his life with his own hands. Well, he could bear that in mind next time, he said to himself with a smile. Then he opened the piano score of the Brahms quartet and began to play. The notes echoed faintly through the windows and the silent house; now and



again a passerby looked up, and some of them stopped for a moment, but the night was bitter and they soon hurried on.

Mertens' fingers sped over the keys, a blissful smile lit up his features, and he swayed his head and body to the rhythm of the opening bars. His heart thrilled with joy unspeakable. The man in whom these sounds were born, before he came to write them down in ink, was a corpulent little man with long hair, a beard and a snub nose, much addicted to cigars; an angel had entered into him—lovelier than the loveliest spiritual plumage of Rembrandt or Grünewald must have been the colours of his soul, when this unuttered, unearthly exaltation passed into sound. For sixteen twisted strings of gut stretched on a hollow wooden frame, this revelation had been scribbled down; a dance of blessed spirits, played by ten fingers that would soon be hanging stiff and numb. Those cadences breathed all the fragrance of the spring breeze as it blew across the flower-starred fields, though behind it sped the shadow of the abyss, and all the corruption that had brought those flowers to birth. It was the music of the world, but of a nobler world, cleansed of all the impulses and savageries of our bestial nature. How good it was to make an end, to slip through the unknown door into the unknown land, on the wings of the only source of joy that had never played him false. He drank out of his glass, with which he had poured a sweet liqueur, and began the second movement: a solemn message of farewell . . . his fingers slid softly over the keys, his ear was alert to catch every undertone, and his lips were set and grave. Men and trees stood up from the rolling earth, he saw them not. Encompassed by the circling atmosphere he saw himself suspended at the edge of space that began above his head and stretched away unbroken to the planets. A musician always felt this; and a writer, too, had the sense that a whole world began behind his back, beneath his feet, over his head. Never had he listened as he listened then. . . . Suddenly, in the full rush of his inspiration, the master paid homage to the

genius of a young Austrian, called Franz Schubert, and quoted one of his songs: "I have lost your footsteps in the snow." . . . What footsteps did a man lose when he gently opened the last door of all, and entered upon a new way that led to new meadows and new cities, built from spiritual elements by unknown dwellers, built of gratitude, good deeds and kindness, brave solitude, fellowship, and the joy of giving, from all that is great and noble in the human soul, that can exist as well in the savage as in the emperor. It was good to be weary, weary of life and weary unto death, weary of being and not-being, weary of what lay above and what lay below, weary of whiteness and of colour.

The opening of the minuet called for some effort from the player, but a threshold was soon passed, and the dance of the air-spirits rippled towards its close. It was no great matter whether the player's fingers obeyed him during the Allegro. The meaning was clear before the notes were struck. But it seemed quite natural that the master, Brahms, should come to the help of his pupil and passionate admirer, arrayed in his old black frock-coat, and sit down at the piano, a stout, squat figure, a cigar stump in his mouth, and play with his own plump hands what he had written, as he meant it to be played, while Mertens rested for a moment. Thus the friends of Socrates had sat and drunk with him. His heart was lulled in a sweet serenity. The spirits of the strings danced in a silvery moonlit minuet, in a night breeze, upon a hill within the scent of seashore pines; foothills and bays sped past his vision. . . . "And the heads sank down on the pillows. Came a youth I can remember. . . ." Grave and beautiful he came from behind the drawn curtain of the bedroom, leaning upon two slim girl flute-players, and Master Brahms looked round quizzically and said in Latin: "Because thou hast loved justice and hated injustice. . . ." What did he mean, thought Mertens in alarm? Was he to die in exile! Could any man fall asleep more blissfully than he was doing in this chair . . . ?

**BOOK SEVEN**  
**THE GREAT COLD**





## CHAPTER I: THE PELICAN

**THE** earth was a stone disk under a sky of ice.

The iron grip of winter held Europe rigid. In Potsdam, for example, where Frau Bertin's parents were able to heat two rooms in their villa, one night the thermometer registered 39 degrees below zero. However, that did not help their son-in-law. Over France, and especially over the heights of the Meuse, the cold was not so intense: 2 below zero, but that was quite enough. Since the beginning of January the gods and demigods of the company had all returned from leave, rather depressed by the reception prepared for them in the most various quarters and the changes that met their eyes. The park uprooted, and again replanted, was once again uprooted, finally this time. It was laid in Mureaux-Ferme wood, a thick and as yet undamaged plantation under the shelter of a hill, and a new railway track would be needed to communicate with Romagne station. When all was complete, the French airmen would long since have detected the clearings in the wood, photographed them, and reported them, with the usual result, and the whole establishment would have to be hurriedly transferred to a new location in the hollow ground near Etraye village. Still, it would be some while before that happened; and the work on the new broad-gauge track began forthwith.

Under the sage direction of Sergeant Schwerdtlein, a working party of navvies was transferred to Romagne, to work opposite the Mureaux-Ferme men. He lived in a stone house and never saw the company on Sundays or on weekdays either. At daybreak, in a heavy frost, the A.S.C. men loaded up their lorries with the ponderous full-size



six-metre rails, others with oaken sleepers, and the rest with broken flints. Then they hoisted themselves on to the top and clattered off to the scene of their labours. Then the lorries were unloaded—the great rails cutting heavily into the men's collar-bones—the ground levelled, the sleepers laid, and the rails put in place. The screwing with heavy bolts and nuts was dealt with by the Württemberg sappers, men of the Landsturm who came from Damvillers and did their duty with a sort of placid disgust. For the greater part of the day they all helped the Russians to prepare the track. Russians? Certainly. Russian prisoners were put at the disposal of the A.S.C., more than sixty men, and where they had their abode no one knew; gaunt figures in russet cloaks, patient, handy at their work, and guarded by a few Prussian Landsturmiers with a smattering of Russian.

Private Bertin was a member of the Schwerdtlein working party. It was a loathsome job, of course. And yet we find him more patient than ever, rather apathetic, but sobered by two escapes from death. For five days he had been attached to the Karde working party, which was in charge of a small testing-station for shells damaged by bombardment; on the sixth day, after he had been sent off to Romagne in the early morning, one of the shells burst, and his bed-neighbour was a dead man: a farm labourer from Upper Hesse, by the name of Biedenkapp, father of three children. And only two days later an airman dropped his egg into the Steinbergquell camp; he destroyed only two officers' latrines, but a broadside of splinters shattered the outer wall of No. 2 hut at the end of the narrow end, where no one but Private Bertin had ever slept. Such incidents make a man thoughtful and disposed to be patient, especially as the same airman, so rumour went, had also visited Montmédy, and there sent a high military official—or several?—into another world. Happy, therefore, was he who could spend his nights in Romagne and labour with his pick by day, and work till he was warm. The clay was frozen to

the consistency of marble, and could only be broken into small shell-shaped fragments. In the fearful cold the men often rested for a while by a fire that the feeblest of the Russians were allowed to tend. A patch of woodland, yet undamaged, stood outlined in glistening network against the sky. The path of the new line was marked by felled trees, blown-up roots, and a levelled ridge. When, after a whole day's work, ten centimetres of the frost-crust had been removed, and the softer clay laid bare, the sun went down. In the night the earth again froze ten centimetres deep, and next day the game began anew.

But the worst of all the jobs, and one universally dreaded, was the unloading of the flint lorries. Men stood, their legs almost frozen stiff, ramming a broad-bladed shovel into the clotted pile of stones that stuck together as though they had been glued, and flinging them with the self-same swing into the new section of line. One man had to beat the stones flat with a mattock, and he was lucky, for he could move about and loosen his coagulating blood. There was not room for more than three men on a lorry without their getting in one another's way.

Privates Lebede, Pahl, and Bertin were that day unloading flints, but while Karl Lebede was strong enough to handle the heavy shovel without overstrain, Bertin and Pahl suffered severely. They had taken off their overcoats, canvas jackets, and jerseys, but they sweated and they froze. They shovelled in dogged silence. The three men were on friendly terms, and Karl Lebede made none of the caustic comments that he would otherwise have used when the two weaker men left him the major part of the work. But just for that very reason they were ashamed to give up. The metallic clash and rattle of the stones was broken by curt shouts of encouragement and abuse. Thus a whole day passed, from the rising of the sun until its going down, and the thoughts of the men hardly dwelt at all upon what they were doing. They thought of the inevitable unlimited U-boat warfare and of the declaration of war by

America that must follow, of which Bertin took such false and foolish views, just like those dictated to the newspapers by the Army Command. And all manner of strange plans and dreams and meditations came into their minds. Some of them were very odd indeed. It was fortunate that human skulls were not made of glass. Private Bertin, for instance, would have been very shocked could he have observed Comrade Pahl's growing determination to sacrifice a little bit of his body so as to carry the remainder home in safety. For that reason Pahl and Lebede had not let him into the secret. Bertin, in their view, was, though a decent fellow, not sound. Moreover he had latterly bought a tin of synthetic dripping from some thieving kitchen orderly, and was quietly consuming it without offering any to his friends. That was not what they expected from him, he must be made to feel it. Well, observed Karl Lebede, these were hard times, and men in the same squad stole each other's parcels; there was no call to take a high line. But on this matter Pahl felt strongly. He was disappointed; synthetic dripping was a good thing, but solidarity was a better one; Bertin no longer showed the same comradely feeling since he had taken to eating his supper on his bunk.

As a preliminary penalty he was told he had been ignored in the disposal of a certain letter, which Sergeant Süssmann, now missing, had entrusted to Comrade Lebede. Instead of taking offence Bertin had quietly asked whether the letter had been duly forwarded. He had become strangely indifferent in these latter days. Yes, life was hard; it wasn't a New Year party with cakes and punch; pride and honour had grown moth-eaten; the fur waistcoat of ideals was wearing thin; and nothing remained but a shabby rabbit-skin, blue and rather bald.

Private Bertin was indeed having a hard time, and it grew harder every day. The toil in the icy air drained his last reserves of energy, and pleasant incidents, of which there were a few, helped him not at all.



One evening, as he was dozing on his bed, while the rest of Sergeant Schwerdtlein's squad were mending their clothes or playing cards, a plump-looking man with a flattened nose and bulging eyes marched into the hut, bringing a gust of chilly air. He looked round him in the harsh carbide light, surveyed the iron stove, the long pipe draped with drying clothes, the bleak windows, mostly padded with newspaper to keep out the frost and wind; then he gasped out that he was looking for a man called Bertin, a barrister, but he seemed to have come to the wrong place. Nearly all the men got up as he entered; in his fur-lined coat he was taken for an officer who had come on a visit of inspection. But Sergeant Porisch genially waved them to their seats again. He saluted friend Schwerdtlein, put a box of cigarettes on the table, and the game was won.

Meantime Bertin roused himself, eyed the visitor sleepily, and said he was the man in question. Whereupon Sergeant Porisch explained that he had not come to eat him up, though he did come from the court martial at Montmédy; he only needed a little information on a certain case which was now before the court martial. And as the major purpose of this journey was also connected with a minor purpose, would Bertin very kindly put on his boots and accompany him to the railway station, where he had a friend on duty, also a Berliner. At the words "Montmédy court martial," Bertin had swung his legs out of his bunk and said: "Aha!" He moved more briskly and in a bare minute he stood at the table ready to go out. "Now we'll go and have one," said Sergeant Porisch in his husky voice, lifting his hand to his mouth in the appropriate fashion. "Well, don't send him back tight," said Sergeant Schwerdtlein. "We start at six sharp tomorrow morning." The others chuckled maliciously.

They made their way cautiously down the dark and slippery steps. The icy streets lay dead under a rasping east wind. "Let's get into a warm place," groaned

Porisch. "My thin boots aren't meant for polar exploration." Bertin, enlivened by the night air, laughed; his companion was wearing light and well-cut civilian boots.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked as they walked on. "To see my old friend Fürth," panted Porisch, as his breath came and went in gasps through his flattened nostrils; "and now we'd better shut up or our gullets'll freeze."

Bertin had some slight acquaintance with Sergeant Fürth, and had always disliked his braggart talk. He seemed to be one of those unpleasantly glib big-city dwellers, of whom there were of course several in the army—and among them Jews like Fürth—who liked to announce their views on every possible occasion; but in his own billet Sergeant Fürth made a much better impression than elsewhere.

He was very hearty in his greeting to Sergeant Porisch, and shook hands with Bertin as warmly as if they had been old acquaintances. The fine scars ran across his right cheek, one straight and one right-angled—*carte* and *tierce*, thought Bertin, and then felt surprised that he had not forgotten these student duelling phrases of his schooldays. However, they were quite in character with the way in which Fürth had decorated his billet. A huge sofa of yellowish wood, upholstered in brown wool, stood against the further wall. Over it Fürth had hung a sort of coat-of-arms painted on paper, with oblique stripes of red and white and black, and in the middle of it a legend in a flowery script headed by an exclamation mark and the mysterious words: "A. J. B.'s the Flag!" Beneath it dangled, upturned on a nail, an embroidered student's cap, and underneath it two crossed sabres of French origin, with a number of ribbons of various academic association twisted through the hilts; on either side, photographs of bearded gentlemen in student dress, cut out of newspapers, were pinned to the wall with drawing-pins. Bertin realized with amazement that all this had drifted here out of the vanished world of German universities, where the young men formed associations ostensibly for convivial purposes, but in reality

to get into touch with "Old Members," who would favour their future careers. But as the various social classes in Germany excluded young Jews of similar origin, on transparent pretexts of race or faith, they had formed leagues of their own, with or without Christians, in so far as they did not, like Bertin, prefer to plunge into the army of free and self-dependent students, where no questions were asked about their origin and their father's means, and nothing mattered but their abilities, industry, and character. Here stood Bertin in the room of an A.J.B. man, who wore colours and fought with sabres like any members of a corps, but who had as a member of the University Jurists' Club been familiar with many eminent colleagues of that great old man, Gotthold Mertens, who, in his time, had first seen the light of day in a modest little parsonage at Güstrow in Mecklenburg.

Tea stood steaming on the table, a bottle of rum for the compounding of grog, and a box of cigars; Sergeant Fürth himself smoked a short pipe. "I feel," he said, beaming at his visitors, "as though I were wearing a student's coat, and this were a clubroom in Munich or Freiburg. We used to have just such Arctic nights as this without any snow. It's uncommonly decent of you, Pogge, to come and look in on me like this." Bertin guessed that "Pogge" was the sergeant's club nickname, a low German word meaning frog, and not inappropriate to Herr Porisch's type. "Not at all," said the other, with a wave of deprecation; "I came to see you and I came to see him"—pointing to Bertin—"but above all I came to please myself. Because I felt I simply must talk. Because I can't keep the thing bottled up inside me, and because I know that in all Berlin I wouldn't find a single dog that would understand or believe it; in our walk of life, we're so patriotic that we think just what we're told to think. And in the War Materials Department, to which I'm being shifted, I naturally have to pretend to be much stupider than anywhere else—has your wall ears, Pelican?"



Bertin could not help laughing. Once more the name was very apt to Sergeant Fürth's big nose, his little round bird-like eyes, and his retreating chin. "Draw in a bit closer." "Yes, but we must first fortify ourselves with a drop o keep out the cold." "An excellent idea," said Porisch, blowing his nose with much emphasis. Was Bertin deceived, or did he notice a glint of moisture in the fat man's eyes?

Well, then; Carl Georg Mertens, formerly judge-advocate at Montmédy, had poisoned himself. He had not, as had been reported in the papers, died as the result of an accident, neither a car crash nor an aeroplane bomb. "It was too much for him, you know," said Sergeant Porisch, and his voice rose almost to a scream. "It was the beastliness of this world that got him down, so he chucked it, and left the job to people with thicker skins and coarser hands—people who have learnt to shovel shit better than he could ever do. He was a gentleman; no one but myself knows what a gentleman he was. And mind you, he was handicapped by being his father's son. The son of old Mertens—why that was a job in itself!" And then Porisch unburdened himself of much that had weighed on his mind for weeks; his words poured out of his mouth, interspersed with cigar smoke, obscure allusions, and uneasy jokes. He dwelt longest on the Belgian deportations because he had helped to collect information about them.

Fürth showed himself better informed on this subject than Bertin, who had so few opportunities of buying newspapers; at that moment, however, he felt more like a lawyer than he had done for years. He had taken off his tunic, and he was sitting in his blue sweater with his elbows on the table. Sips of steaming grog warmed his inner man. Now he understood what had lately surprised him in the neighbourhood of Romagne: civilians in thin black Sunday clothes, who, leaning on their great shovels, stood immovable by the roadsides, without working to get themselves warm. That these were Belgian civilians, he had been

told by the Landsturm guards, who had, indeed, long since given up trying to drive the Belgians to work. They starved, they froze, but they did not move a finger. Private Bertin had been much impressed by the spectacle; compulsory recruitment, it was called, and the words dissembled the reality. But he had not approved the savage contempt with which these Belgians regarded those of their fellow-countrymen who toadied to the guards in Flemish, lit fires for them, heated their coffee, and took bread from them in return. It was wartime, he reflected; people must not be so fastidious and so proud. The conquered must come to terms with their conquerors and not suffer to no purpose. Now, coloured by the dead Mertens's indignation, these things acquired another aspect. But Porisch continued. "Until the very last the judge-advocate was dealing with the Kroysing affair. So this point concerns you," he said with troubled eyes. "The name of the sender wasn't given, but your name was mentioned in an enclosure among the papers, in the handwriting of the elder Kroysing—that mysterious lieutenant whom Mertens and I often used to talk about. You, as his dead brother's friend were to come forward with your evidence in case of need. After that we heard nothing more from him; the reply to our inquiries was—missing. Well, four or five days after C. G. Mertens had been consigned to the Church of St. Matthew in Berlin, there came a message from this fellow Kroysing; he was in Dannevoux field hospital with a broken shin-bone, and said he intended to take the matter up again when he was cured."

"Then he's alive!" cried Bertin, jerking himself bolt upright. "Oddly enough he is. And now I have one question to ask you. Are you the man who got to know young Kroysing the day before his death?" "Certainly," said Bertin. "Then you didn't belong to his company, and you don't speak from any personal observation?" "No." "Thank you," concluded Porisch wearily; "then that's no good to him at all. My professor's successor



is just an ordinary hidebound official, who consigns any superfluous stuff *ad acta*, in other words—to the Devil. And no lieutenant can fight that, not even this one. Kroysing seems made of iron,” added Porisch, wagging his head. Bertin nodded silently; that wasn’t far off the truth; made of iron, and mad too—a man possessed.

The Pelican, who was in fact Alexander Fürth, barrister-at-law, with an office in the Bülowstrasse and a house in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, imperiously demanded an explanation. He could not endure that Pogge should sit in his room and talk shop. Porisch and Bertin told him, partly what they themselves knew, and partly what they thought about the case. But the Pelican wagged his head at them. “You should be glad it’s buried. What good is it to anyone, if a camel passes by again and eats the grass that’s grown over it?” But Porisch, barrister-at-law, blew out his cheeks; this case was the last bequest of a just man, a man without an evil thought, and he could not let it be lost in the usual daily flood of muck. “Well,” said Fürth, “that alters the case. But our guest”—and he turned for an instant to Bertin—“must be warned to keep his fingers quite outside this butter-sauce or he’ll get ’em blistered. I’ve seen you often enough starting off in the early morning, and wondered why you haven’t clicked for an easier job long ago; but that is by the way. All I can do for you, my dear Pogge, is to provide you with a bit of news that may be useful or may not.” “Stop,” broke in Bertin, under the influence of rum and a general sense of well-being, and returning in his own mind to the time when he looked pityingly upon corps students and their like as throwbacks in the course of human development, little better than tattooed savages with their scars and fancy dresses. “The most important thing is to find the whereabouts of Danne-voux field hospital.”

The Pelican glared at him, but Fürth silently produced a map from a cupboard and spread it out; they found Romagne, Flabas, even Crépion and Moirey, but no place

called Dannevoux. Helplessly they eyed the brightly coloured sheet, the city of Verdun, Douaumont, and the winding course of the Meuse; then the Pelican laid the pointed nail of his little finger on a name: Dannevoux. "But how on earth is anyone going to get there?" exclaimed Bertin. "It's on the left bank." True, the world did continue on the further side of that black serpentine stream; but it lay within the area of another command, and it was questionable whether the discovery was any use. The Pelican leaned gravely back and folded his arms. "I don't know whether this is a bit of good luck for you or not, Pogge, old man. But in any case I might as well tell you that Mopsus is judge-advocate over yonder with the Lychow Army Group. Do you know Mopsus?"

Porisch looked at him with open eyes; of course he knew Mopsus, otherwise, Herr Posnanski, barrister-at-law, not only from the list of Old Members, but personally, from club celebrations and casual encounters in the corridors of the Berlin courts. "How do you know he's there?" he inquired, only to be asked whether he did not read the *A.J.B. News*. No, Porisch did not study it with much attention; to which the Pelican replied triumphantly that he must not be surprised to find himself rather left behind. "On the left bank," said Porisch, reflectively. "Near Esnes or Montfaucon, I fancy," said the Pelican. "I haven't got much time," explained Porisch; "but I'll go and see that lieutenant and tell him to apply to Mopsus." "Yes," agreed Fürth, "he'll give him some advice." Bertin yawned; he was growing tired. Besides, he felt little interest in these people with their fantastic names. And he would have to be hauling railway lines next morning. "I won't conceal from you," observed the Pelican meanwhile, "that I don't think there's much chance for the lieutenant; the enemy has got too much of a start." "I would much like to see," said Bertin, yawning again, "what would be the result among the Prussians if neither side had a start." No one replied to this; the others were waiting for him to

go. To fill up the pause, Porisch said that a black notebook had been found among Lieutenant Kroysing's papers that had belonged to his brother, and which no one could read, because, as was well known, none of the Mertens pupils was ever allowed to write shorthand. And they both laughed as they remembered the outbursts of the bearded old gentleman at the desk, when, at the beginning of a term, freshmen tried to write down his lecture. He hated this Mephistophelian wisdom—he would thunder out—which Goethe in pure irony had put into the Devil's mouth. It was not what a man had written down in black and white that he should carry home in gratitude, but what he had written on his heart, and his course of lectures was intended for those who wished to study law, and not for clerks.

Bertin got up abruptly; what was the time? Sergeant Fürth said it was nearly "lights out," and he had better get along. He spoke in a very mild tone, invited Bertin to come and warm himself by his stove as often as he liked, pressed a couple of cigars on him, and lighted him down the stairs, after Porisch had shaken his hand in warm commiseration and expressed the hope that he would survive the winter. The Pelican returned, shook some railway coal into his stove, filled his pipe, and observed: "He needs good wishes, God knows. We always get a tip here about what's in store for these A.S.C. chaps, before they know it themselves." "What's your exact position here?" asked Porisch. "Theoretically," replied the Pelican, "I'm an N.C.O. on the Railway Staff; in practice I'm the Railway Transport Officer at Romagne, and run the whole show. My lieutenant drinks, lets me do the work, and signs the chits. That suits us both excellently; I know everything that's going on, and get leave just whenever I please. . . . Well, that lad and his whole squad are going to be relieved by men of No. 4 Company of the same battalion, and he'll disappear from my view. They're going to be attached to a very unpleasant unit under a



Hamburg sergeant by the name of Barkopp. How do I know this? From Barkopp himself, who was putting down a powerful lot of schnapps at the club last evening, on that very account. They're going to be trained to look for duds, and may think themselves lucky." "Duds? What are they wanted for?" asked Porisch, as though he had never worn a tunic. "My dear Pogge," retorted the Pelican, "and you're off to a cushy job in the War Materials Department! To pop off at the French, of course, and win the war." "Well, here's your health," replied Porisch.

Meantime Bertin's footsteps were echoing through the icy night. The sharp air raised his spirits once again. The tea and the grog had done him good, and he had enjoyed his encounter with the Pelican. He would certainly keep up the acquaintance; but in any case the evening had brought him the great consolation that Eberhard Kroysing was still alive and safe. It was an odd condition of humanity when serious physical damage was the price of safety, and was gladly paid. He must write to him at the earliest opportunity; not at once, perhaps, but when things were going rather better with him, so that he should not have to turn up looking such a death's-head. If the weather would improve, and the work wasn't quite so hard, and he could get a few days' leave, he would indeed take Kroysing's advice to heart, and try to keep his tail up. Panting and sweating, just before the clock struck nine, he made his way up to his hut, where the men were snoring peacefully, all unconscious of what was in store for them, because certain gods have fallen out and had cast their lots over mortal men.

## CHAPTER II: WHEN THE GODS FALL OUT

IF Lieutenant von Roggstroh, in addition to being a good fellow, had had rather more experiences of army life, he would have taken occasion to discover whether the superior officers in Bertin's neighbourhood were adequately provided with decorations before carrying out his kindly intent, when he at last found time to turn round. But unfortunately he did not. Shortly after the New Year his recommendation arrived in the battalion orderly room at Damvillers, by way of the park orderly room, so that Colonel Stein and Major Jansch were almost simultaneously urged to secure the Iron Cross II for Private Bertin of the A.S.C.

The two officers, who, as we already know, were on the worst possible terms, represented two quite opposite types: Colonel Stein was an old cavalryman, stout, quick-tempered but not without good humour, Major Jansch, gaunt, embittered, nervous, but master of himself so long as he was not thwarted. Both men, of course, wore the black-and-white ribbon in their button-holes. But as they read the memorandum by Lieutenant von Roggstroh, nephew of an influential landed proprietor in East Prussia, on Private Bertin's gallantry, it flashed into both those officers' minds that this affair, if carefully manipulated, might be worth an Iron Cross I for each of them.

"Now, look here," Colonel Stein had observed to his counsellor and adjutant, "with all respect to your prophetic gifts, it really isn't feasible. A little A.S.C. major in Damvillers can't possibly put in for the Iron Cross I. We were actually on the spot. Bombardier Schulz supplied Lieutenant von Roggstroh with three hundred contact fuses and fifty time fuses. It's our show and that's flat."

"Our," thought Lieutenant Benndorf: "Your, you mean," but he did not say so; he merely observed: "And what about this chap Bertin?" "Turn him down," said the colonel tersely. "We come first. Besides he'd sooner have a bit of leave than the Iron Cross. In any case, damn the A.S.C. I don't know them, and they don't know me, and if anyone's going to get a dicky-bird, it's me." "Well," said Lieutenant Benndorf, walking to the window of the bleak office-room, "you're wrong on one point, sir. You do know this man."

"I can't recall that I've had the honour," growled the colonel, as a twinge of pain shot through his leg. Lieutenant Benndorf went on, not from malice, but merely to deaden his disgust at the calm assumption that he must stand aside. "You have seen the man, sir. Don't you remember that time when a batch of French prisoners were marching past and the A.S.C. men were giving them water! There was a black-bearded Israelite who actually gave a Frenchman a drink out of his own cooking-pot. That was Bertin."

The colonel remembered vaguely, and quite without resentment. "Ah, yes, that was the fellow," said he, lighting the cigarette. "Well, if you really think that Jansch is likely to get busy, we had better go across and politely tell him to desist. I'll present him with a box of chocolates, and the little man will be so delighted that he will forget all about the Emperor and the Almighty, not to mention the Iron Cross—which, after all, he can't put in his mouth."

He roared with laughter at his own joke. Lieutenant Benndorf merely grinned and nodded. The truth about Major Jansch could not be hushed up in a little town like Damvillers; he had a schoolgirl's passion for sweets, and this trifling weakness made the major a good more vulnerable than he suspected.

When his enemy was announced, Major Jansch reacted at once. His eyes flashed like those of a weasel, and his hair almost stood on end. He was busy drawing a map for his *Army and Navy Weekly*, a prospective map of the



German Empire, in which Lützelburg, Nanzig, and Werden were included once more in the motherland; not to mention Holland, Switzerland, Milan and Lombardy, Courland, Livonia, Lithuania, and Estonia as far as Dorpat. It may be disclosed to the uninitiated that Lützelburg, Nanzig and Werden were at present most regrettably called Luxemburg, Nancy, and Verdun. But the members of the Pan-German Union and the Anti-Semitic Association felt obliged to re-introduce the good old German nomenclature. He folded up his map, smoothed his Balkan moustache, straightened his tunic, and got up to meet his visitor.

His room was pleasantly warm, it was perhaps rather too warm, and the colonel regarded it as stuffy; and he politely asked to be allowed to open a window. Major Jansch sourly consented. There would be a dispute, the colonel usually talked at the top of his voice, and the whole business would be public property in no time. Very well, he was ready.

Within three minutes the two gamecocks were at each other's throats, and the feathers began to fly. The colonel could not believe that the major could seriously claim a decoration over this affair. It was well known that he never left his office, and no man could claim the Iron Cross I for sitting on his behind in Damvillers. In a low and icy tone Major Jansch retorted that it was every man's duty to remain at his post—and he observed that the colonel had appeared at Damvillers while the ammunition park was being burnt out.

Colonel Stein roared with laughter. Well, well. . . . So the major presumed to pose as a moralist, and reproach other people with what was a very proper withdrawal, while he himself had never put his nose anywhere near a shell. That was really too much. . . . Herr Major Jansch did not agree. In any event, Lieutenant von Roggstroh had recommended a man in the battalion for a decoration, and not a man from the park personnel. Did the park

authorities propose to impound the distinctions won by I/X/20? That was really beyond the limit. He was getting rather tired of all this incessant interference. No one had any right to question his performance of his duties, and he would decide who should get a decoration in his battalion. There was no sort of doubt about that. "It's a pity," said Colonel Stein, remaining comfortably seated; "it's a pity you're such an awkward card. I was going to suggest a box of chocolates as a consolation prize; I thought you would far prefer that to a decoration that you can't eat." At this Major Jansch exploded. Unfortunately Colonel Stein was sitting with his back to the window, so that he had an excellent view of the large tin box of Belgian sweets that stood on the floor at the major's right. Jansch slammed down the lid and hissed out savagely. "What the hell do you mean, sir? Awkward card, indeed! If you don't know how to behave yourself, you'd better go back to school and learn." Colonel Stein turned in amazement to Lieutenant Benndorf; "Dear me," he said, as though Herr Jansch was not in the room; "What does the man mean? There's only one person in this place who ought to be back at school." Major Jansch's face grew pale, then blotched, then pale once more; he gasped for breath. He knew he was unpopular, and he did not care; he thought it natural that a man of superior intellect should be disliked by fools. However, he must control himself, try to be more conciliatory, wait till Niggel got back, and gain time. So he reverted to the attack. He hinted that his colonel possessed a great many decorations already, and would hardly wish to rob the widow of her ewe lamb. The man recommended in the report definitely belonged to I/X/20; surely it must be perfectly obvious to everyone that his gallantry had brought credit to his unit, and the matter was not one in which Colonel Stein could claim to be concerned. When a gunner belonging to the park came under officers of another unit, then it would be the colonel's turn. In all right and justice . . .



Colonel Stein leapt out of his chair in sudden and surprising wrath; at any rate, Lieutenant Benndorf did not realize until later that his chief's outburst was due to his consciousness that there was a kernel of truth in all this twaddle. "The widow's ewe lamb!" he shouted. "Right and justice! We'll soon show up the sort of unit you command, sir. In all right and justice I should have had the man who came under this officer's notice court-martialled last July. He came under his own officer's notice for disgraceful conduct in fraternizing with a French prisoner, in full view of the park command—and under my very own eyes, sir!—he gave a swine a drink out of his own cooking-pot. Against my express order, sir! However, Benndorf here persuaded me to take a mild view of the case at the time. But if you're going to make trouble, I'll take care the facts are reported in the proper quarter. And the inspector-general will soon have you on the mat for not keeping proper discipline, my dear sir!"

Major Jansch grew pale again. He felt his stomach contract with fury. What was this? Was this some incident in the summer of which he had not been told? If this old soaker was telling the truth, and did what he threatened to do—he might give up any hope of an Iron Cross I. Indiscipline and fraternization were serious matters. Jansch quietly turned to Lieutenant Benndorf, who stood silent with folded arms against the wall; they at least had kept their tempers, and he asked the Herr Lieutenant for an explanation. "Nonsense," broke in Colonel Stein; "ask the men of your own unit." But Lieutenant Benndorf who disliked the resuscitation of old troubles, hurriedly told his story, which, he said, might surely be allowed to drop. Jansch listened attentively. He certainly could not pass over such a matter, he said gravely, and he would take care it was dealt with in the proper Prussian manner.

But he was not going to surrender his claim to Iron Cross I, and they would see who got it in the end. Colonel Stein got up. "Yes," he said curtly; "we shall indeed," and

bet a ton of chocolate against a glass of brandy, that he and no other would wear that decoration. Then he put on his cap, saluted casually, and departed; once outside, he cursed his adjutant for having failed to back him up; they would never down the little beast in this fashion. It was none of their business if the fellow did drop on that wretched private after all. And he added in a tone of deep conviction; "You're a very kind-hearted chap, I know, but I wish you'd explain to me what this so-called Bertin has got to do with my Iron Cross." And he opened his eyes in amazement as the lieutenant stopped halfway down the stairs and burst out laughing. Then he clapped a hand to his forehead and laughed too; he was being paid out for that fatal beard, over which he had quarrelled with Herr Jansch.

Major Jansch closed the window, feeling quite exhausted. Then he slipped a sweet into his mouth, a long pink one with a raspberry flavour; up and down he stamped, and the orderly room trembled. They all had to sit and listen; the staff sergeant, Diehl, the clerk, Behrend, the post orderly, and even Kuhlmann, the messenger, and all drew their various conclusions for the future regulation of their conduct. All four had their abode in a nice warm room, their feet were dry, and their food as good as was possible that winter. Not one of them wanted to make any sort of slip that might send him back to shovel muck with the poor toilers in that ravaged land they knew too well. Two of them, the staff sergeant and the messenger, were ready to play up to any of the major's moods. The other two merely wanted to keep clear. This fellow Bertin had no luck; first that affair with the water-tap, then his leave was stopped, and now this trouble over the Iron Cross II, not to mention the revival of the water-tap affair, in the row between the two C.O.'s, this was more than any man could survive.

There was no need to wait until Niggel came back. There

he sat, eagerly whispering his advice in broad Bavarian—a dream-Niggl, or rather a remembered Niggl, conjured up by the voice of the Herr major's fantasy. For it was Major Jansch's custom to make a rather lavish use of his imagination; it was a gift, or rather a way of escape, that had survived from his boyhood days. In his waking visions he took vengeance on his enemies, pardoned those who misjudged him, and gave advice to the Kaiser, which that short-sighted potentate always failed to follow; then he, Jansch, a humble major, saved the Fatherland. He had long been given a visionary *Pour le Mérite*, the highest order in the Prussian state, for an imaginary strategic masterpiece that had destroyed the traitorous Italian army by a poisonous gas bombardment from the air, and German divisions could now break into France through Turin and Savoy and advance upon Lyons and Avignon. Moreover an unknown major of the Supreme Army Command had performed the inestimable service of stirring up a vast revolt among the oppressed Little Russians in the Ukraine, who had called in the Germans as liberators. No one knew the author of that admirable plan, he remained modestly obscure, and contented himself with his consciousness of having saved the Fatherland, and deserved well of its leaders.

The little man who paced that room, was quite unperturbed that the reality outside his dreams progressed as usual: Colonel Stein, for example, whom he had several times publicly degraded for his conduct to a colleague, or had reduced to the command of a punishment battalion, had in fact just left the house unmolested, after heartily abusing its occupant. Jansch sucked honey from his fantasies, and hardly ventured into his chill world of reality. At that moment he envisaged Private Bertin of the A.S.C. in a cutting frost, tied up to a tree and now hanging there unconscious in his bonds, and he gloated on this just infliction. He saw, too, before his inner vision, the image of the crafty Bavarian, who had so quietly disposed of an



unwelcome member of his battalion. There sat the evocation of Herr Niggel, whether he liked it or not, rubbing his smart tweed tunic against the wooden chair-back, and modestly offering advice in soft Bavarian to a much abler and more important personage, Major Jansch. He could hear his visitor genially advising him to forward Lieutenant von Roggstroh's recommendation with the curt comment that the man in question had remained at his post in the field-gun park on the express order of the battalion commander. And then he, Captain Niggel, upon the occasion of a beer evening at the Group Command, would take occasion to put forward the Herr major's claims.

But Private B. must be consigned to an advanced working party where there would be some risk. And there he must remain until, in the natural course, he met with an accident. That little Jew was a ready writer, and a plausible talker too, quite capable, if questioned, of making a great deal of trouble. He must be put where no one was likely to ask him any questions. Still flushed with indignation, and still stalking up and down, Major Jansch listened to the counsels that came from that empty chair. Just such a working party was shortly to be formed and would be stationed close to the left bank of the Meuse. Its task would be to collect stray ammunition, unexploded shells, rejected bombs, examine them, and send them back. The park had already established this service on a small scale, under Bombardier Knappe, and only a few days before had had to report two dead and seven wounded as the result of a distressing explosion; among the latter was Sergeant Karde, a good soldier and a most popular man whose left leg had unfortunately been blown off below the knee. This mishap had produced so unpleasant an impression that the park had decided to shift this service much further forward, and put it in charge of Sergeant Barkopp of No. I Company, a man still under a cloud from days long past in Serbia. This would be a very suitable place for Private B. With a smile on his face

Herr Jansch accompanied his imaginary visitor to the door, feeling greatly cheered, and shook a visionary right hand; indeed he actually opened and shut the door.

Then he marched back to the writing-table, and scrawled on a sheet of paper: "Remember B.," slipped it into a drawer where it would catch his eye, and rang for his messenger, Kuhlmann. It was time for dinner; the major had worked hard, and in spite of all the sweets he had eaten he was hungry.

### CHAPTER III: THE PURCHASE PRICE

"DUD" was the term given to shells that for reasons of faulty manufacture, or from mere accident, do not explode. They lie about the country like great elongated Easter eggs, waiting for the fortunate finder. They might be lying here or there or anywhere. Sometimes there were many, sometimes they were few and far between. So the searchers had to range over the country, mark the places where they found a shell and then fetch an expert to examine each one and say whether they could be safely picked up and shifted; then they accumulated near the railway line, after which they were taken to a testing station, and when there were enough to fill three trucks, it paid to forward them home. In the easy-going days of the first war year the search for duds was the private affair of gunners and A.S.C. men, who made all sorts of war mementoes from the copper screw rings; a lively trade compensated them for the risk involved in knocking off these bangles. In the meantime, as so often happens, a state monopoly had replaced individual enterprise.

Sergeant Barkopp's men scattered over the plateau, where the countless craters and shell-holes seemed to offer a promising field for search. Franz could indeed see what was going on, and often indicated his interest with shrapnel or high explosive. Only a few days before, they had found, lying peacefully on its back, the grinning corpse of Private Franz Reiter, an infantryman from Aachen, with nothing in his pocket but a picture postcard addressed to him, and of course without boots. Lebede, Pahl, and Bertin, all members of this party, lingered meditatively by Herr Reiter, until Karl Lebede suggested they had better go



on, observing sadly: "Wherever we go, someone had always got there first. You're out of luck, Wilhelm." This remark referred to Wilhelm Pahl's footgear, which had become completely useless. His boots had for weeks past been in the hands of the company shoemaker at Etraye, where they had not been repaired because the owner, like the rest of the Barkopp working party, lived in a hut at the so-called railway station of Vilosnes-Ost, and so could not come and make a fuss. In the meantime he had been wearing a pair of laced shoes which had worn out ten days ago; the frozen clay had proved too much for the smooth soles, and under the ball of the left foot and under the great toe of the right one, Pahl was walking on the inner sole. Starving as he was, he went about his work in a self-centred sort of fashion, apparently unperturbed: there was, in fact, a burden on his mind.

The whole of Sergeant Barkopp's working party was indeed in a desperate state. The men's underclothes were threadbare from frequent washing with corrosive soaps, and there was no more warmth in them. Their tunics had turned a clayey brown, their trousers were slit and torn from much clambering about in barbed wire, and were patched with multi-coloured wool or twine. They had given up their conflict with the lice that infested them, and never asked what the next day would bring; what could it bring? They never read, they never played chess or a mouth-organ, and no ship's piano created an illusion of cheerfulness when their work was over. When darkness stopped their labours, they crawled into their hut, played at sleeping, quarrelled, or wrapped a few rags about their heads and went out to see what they could cadge. The rations received by a battalion are first sifted by the H.Q. staff, then by the company staffs and their favourites, and then by the company kitchens; what is left finds its way to the working parties in the field, who must therefore go out on cadging expeditions if their bellies are to be filled at all. The stronger men went out each evening

and ranged over the surrounding country, seeking what they could find, and what they did find they kept to themselves; they might fall in with a battery field kitchen, a reserve infantry company, a railway section (they were always well-provided), a transport depot, or, with luck, a field hospital. A hospital was naturally an oasis and a foretaste of paradise; and who could resist a pot full of beef and barley stew? Knowing fellows, like Karl Lebede, soon acquired a profound insight into the characters of kitchen N.C.O.'s and their assistants, and of the kitchen orderlies in the units near by. They knew where to queue up and hold out their pots in silence; where they had to beg with due humility; where a joke or two was likely to find favour; and where a cigarette must be produced to get a meal. Bertin provided cigarettes as barter for his food; Wilhelm Pahl always got his for nothing; but he had to eat it to the accompaniment of Karl Lebede's genial comments, and that he did not like; a dark determination had possessed his mind. All these men began to feel that the German army was likely to starve to death before the war came to an end. They felt themselves in an inexorable grip, and the only happy man among them was Naumann II, the company idiot. This little grimacing oaf, by profession a packer in a Steglitz warehouse, with gigantic hands and feet and ears, and watery blue eyes, had also been pushed into the Barkopp party, no doubt on the plea that he was an intelligent man and knew how to handle explosives. . . . Well, Sergeant Barkopp had clapped the foolish creature genially on the shoulder, had him photographed grasping a shell and grinning from ear to ear, and put him to clean the huts; "Make yourself useful with the broom, my son." And Naumann, half paralysed as he was from stunted glands, did so, in utter loyalty to the powers that be, as embodied by Barkopp, and all whom life had treated in rather less step-motherly fashion than himself.

Barkopp, a tavern-keeper in a seaport, proved an excellent leader of a working party. He soon learnt from



Bombardier Knappe how to distinguish dangerous duds from harmless ones; how to look for open fuse-holes, and the angle at which they lay. He was keen and competent, and had soon trained a handful of his men who showed some aptitude. "Far better leave one more where it lies, than pick up one too many," was his motto. Especially dangerous ones were surrounded with little fences—the country was littered with branches and rusty barbed wire—and in case of need they were dropped into flooded craters where they gradually dissolved in rust. Hitherto there had been no accident. What Barkopp was especially after were little ammunition dumps attached to batteries that had been wrecked or withdrawn. In gullies and sheltered places such a find was often brought to light; all over the war-zone such stores had been recklessly squandered, and their discovery after so long was now no easy task. Emil Barkopp having fallen into disfavour, had been constantly transferred, and was a man of much experience: with his own eyes, he had watched artillerymen put down a layer of shells in the mud, after the first rainfall, then cartridge baskets, and finally more shells, with the fuses extracted, to provide a foundation on which they ate and drank and slept. Such hidden treasure needed a good deal of preliminary exploration, and Barkopp's emissaries were to be seen in all directions. None but Barkopp, and Bombardier Knappe, with his goatee beard, and gaunt and meditative countenance, knew the lie of the country. None of the men had maps; they found their way about by the convolutions of the front line and the positions of the stars. They merely noticed that they were close to the Meuse, and would soon be shifted from one bank to the other. The greater part of I/X/20 was stationed in the gullies by Etraye where the command had finally established their ammunition dump.

But the working parties now spread diagonally across the whole sector to the east of the Meuse, and Barkopp's was the most westerly. Vilosnes and Sivry were connected

by a bridge, but were otherwise isolated. The French had been firing the whole summer through, from the right, and from the heights of the left bank, where the antagonists lay face to face.

A yellow light brooded over the high plateau. Private Bertin had gone rather far on one such quest, and darkness had begun to fall. He stumbled on, leaping back and forward, found a path, and went slowly along it, panting. But the French batteries in the former German position also knew that path, and before it was quite dark they dropped a few well-intentioned shells in its direction. In that chill air the crack of the discharge was heard at once. As the shell crashed, Private Bertin lay prostrate, as flat as a bug. But while the splinters whined across him like gigantic cockchafers, he asked himself in bitter self-contempt why he should take cover in this senseless fashion? Why prolong his life from one shell-burst to the next? Why not offer fate a hand, and heave up his hindquarters for the benefit of a passing splinter. He had often half resolved to let his foot be crushed by the next truck that came along: but had never quite made up his mind. However, if this went on for another two months, there was no knowing what he would do. For the time being, he lay flat upon the earth and clung to life. Then the evening blessing ceased; he clapped mud off his clothes, pulled his cap down over his head-protector, and trotted off to get some food and warmth. True it was, though he had not realized it, that of all that party, in his whole aspect and demeanour, he most resembled the poor half-wit, Naumann Ignatz.

The icy wind from the glaciers of the north and the eastern plains whistled over the cloven, ravaged land, tearing at the shattered tree trunks, howled and swept onwards. Between the ochrous earth and the grey pall of cloud, the wind alone held sway, hunted and tormented, lacerating his airy essence on the rusty teeth of the barbed

wire in an ecstasy of self-destruction. There were ten thousand kilometres of wire between the storm-tossed channel and the great walls of Switzerland, and he lashed himself to frenzy on that headlong course. He gashed himself on the knife-sharp edges of mouldering preserve tins, and sped on lamenting; he could not stay, he was too eager to plunge into the warmer Western ocean; but he grabbed at every rag of rolling cloth and paper, tossed and whirled them into shell craters, recking nothing of the rats that peered out of their holes, starving because the world had suddenly turned to stone, and surged onwards, sweeping over the plains, hissing through the gorges, as splendid as a prodigal heir squandering his last gold pieces in riotous living, knowing that his glory must soon end.

Two A.S.C. men sought and found shelter from him at the bottom of a broad deep shell-crater. They were sitting as they thought upon a thick sheet of ice, but they were wrong. They were in fact sitting on the upturned base of an ice cone, the peak of which pointed downwards to the centre of the earth, and in which, embedded like an embryo in the womb, a soldier of Germany lay frozen, awaiting the thaw and the advent of summer. Then he would come to light, and remnants of his fleshless bones and rags of uniform would be covered with earth, and a wooden cross erected with the legend: "Here lies a brave German soldier," though it might so be that no one would take all that trouble, for by that time the first squadrons of tanks would have appeared on the horizon, the first American airmen would have arrived to relieve the French, and things in general would be looking livelier on the western front. Of all this the two men knew nothing as they spread out their legs, trusting to their many layers of clothing to keep them tolerably warm. One of them, Karl Lebede, had indeed taken the precaution of bringing a supply of old newspapers with him and shared them with his friend. Newspapers, as all beggars knew, were a protection against the extremest cold, and would protect the



hinder quarters against the iciest contacts, thanks to the infinitesimally thin layers of air between the sheets. And indeed both men looked like beggars, muddy, unwashed, swathed in nondescript grey wrappings, their frozen faces emerging from dark grey head-protectors, with blue noses and reddened eyes.

Wilhelm Pahl and Karl Lebede were talking to each other in an undertone, not exactly in a whisper, but just so that no one could hear their voices from outside. Something tense in their features, a furtive look of haste and fear, suggested that something unusual was in the air. Karl Lebede held in his hand a pointed, rusty implement—a filed nail, which must have lain out in the wet for some time after being filed, for the point, too, was thick with red rust.

“Oh Karl, old chap,” groaned Pahl, “if only I didn’t funk it so. First the pain, and I’m so sensitive to pain. Then the hospital, and if they have to operate I’m sure there won’t be any chloroform to spare. So it’ll hurt all the more. And I daresay I’ll never be able to walk about or do my job again.” “My lad,” answered Karl Lebede, “a purchaser has to put down the price. That’s the way of it in this vale of tears. Now then, give us your foot and uncle will puncture it so you’ll hardly notice.” “I should shout a little louder so that Barkopp or old Knappe will come and have a look.” Karl Lebede knew that neither Barkopp nor Knappe nor anyone else could be near by. But as the mutilation which he was about to undertake at his friend’s request was subject to the most bloodthirsty penalties by the regulations of the Citizen Army, because it was the only really effective evasion of the vengeance of the class state, he clambered up the crater wall set his face into the wind and peered about him. It was about half past nine in the morning; not a human soul in sight that could observe the head and freckled hand that suddenly emerged. He slithered down again and said genially: “Now then, old boy, you know you said that just to gain

time.” “Yes, I know I did. I feel ghastly. God knows what’ll be the end of it.” Karl Lebede’s voice assumed the soothing tone of a mother trying to persuade her little son to come with her to the dentist: “Look here, Wilhelm, you can give it a miss as far as I’m concerned. I’ve listened to all you’ve told me these long winter evenings, and I don’t fancy your prospects myself. The German workers are a bit too stupid—how stupid they are only a man knows that’s been brought up behind a bar and listened to the rubbish they talk, year in year out.” “That doesn’t apply to the Berlin workers, Karl.” “Oh yes it does, Wilhelm. Our comrades are all right, and the Hamburgers are all right—they’re sound at heart. And now I daresay they’ve got their tails up because their bellies are empty, and they may listen to you and a few other fellows that are working at home, and they’ll down tools, and go out and shout for peace. And what will happen then? None of you will be put up against a wall. A thousand or so will be called up, eighty or ninety will find themselves in the clink, and the rest will be given bigger rations with a bit of bacon thrown in now and again—‘extra allowance for the heavy worker’—and that will be the end of that.” “And you think the Berlin worker doesn’t know all about it long ago, and will let the Russians go one better? Why, if you can believe what you read in the papers, they’re trying to put some life into their Duma by general strikes and riots outside the bakers’ shops.” “Yes. I do think so. (Karl Lebede tried to be as verbose as possible, so as to distract his companion’s attention.) I know as little as you do about Russia. But I do know, my dear Wilhelm, if *Vorwärts* hasn’t been pulling our legs all these years, that there are a few little differences between the Russians and ourselves. For instance: in Russia the oppression was always greater than with us, and there was real starvation; Siberia was always near at hand, the middle class didn’t like Tsarism, and the opinion of the world was against it. And think of those grand defeats by the

Japanese in 1905. In Russia it's a case of absolute cleavage between class and class, there's no kind of bridge between them. But in Germany we're all friends together, the Socialist persecution under Bismarck didn't amount to much anyway, it's been long since forgotten, and the Labour Party is so full of brains and so fond of talking about the state of the future that it doesn't notice that a proletarian on Sunday is only just a little bit less than a bourgeois on a weekday. And when the high collars get to talking about the flag, the proletarians' hearts begin to beat, and no less a man than August Bebel burst all his seams, put his politics behind him, shouldered a musket and marched against Russia; and the high collars laughed. Now why did they laugh? He spoke the truth. And that was in peace time, when the soldiers had to mind what they said, and the Socialist Party treasury was full. And that's the difference, you see. Out of nothing nothing comes."

Wilhelm Pahl had listened attentively, with both legs outstretched in front of him, thankful for the respite. On the sole of the left boot there was a gaping tear over the ball of the foot, and the right was worn away under the great toe. Karl Lebede, convinced that he had successfully diverted his friend's attention, surveyed these bare patches with his little glittering eyes. Furtively he reached for the rusty nail, on which he had that morning fixed a rough wooden shaft made from an elder twig. "Out of nothing nothing comes," repeated Pahl in the meantime. "And that's just why I must get a move on and do something for the comrades at home. There are signs from Russia that the time has come, so I asked you to do this for me. I thought it would be quite simple. But the first time I tried to step on a bit of rusty wire, I noticed at once that the first step is the hard one. But I didn't know how hard. I daresay you'll laugh at me; but now I'm beginning to think that after all I can best do it myself. It's like shaving, when the other fellow cuts you it hurts more." Karl



Lebede smiled. "All right, old chap," said he; "you do it yourself."

Wilhelm Pahl sat leaning back against the sloping crater wall, on his face an agonized expression of pain that quite touched the other's heart. "I feel just cleaned out," he said. "There's no flesh on my bones, and what with tramping about all day half dazed with the cold, and the lice that make it impossible to sleep at night, and no warm water to wash my underclothes. . . ." And he groaned and shut his eyes. "If you hadn't scrounged a bit extra for us out of the field kitchens, I shouldn't have had enough marrow in my bones to get up in the morning. Ow!!" he screamed suddenly; "what are you doing?" Karl Lebede pointed to the bodkin in Pahl's shoe. "You've got a good inch of it in you, my son. Now don't move for five minutes. The rest is in the hands of God, who invented the circulation of the blood." Pahl grew slowly pale, and a shudder shook him. "I'm glad it's over," he said; "you managed it well; it's a nasty job, and it's no good pretending anything else. But it had to be done. I thought it over carefully. And, anyway, it's no great sacrifice to make for the cause." "Ah, now there's some colour coming back into your face, Wilhelm. The spirit is willing, but the flesh isn't cheap," grinned Lebede. "This evening you must report to old Barkopp that you trod on a bit of barbed wire." "It was only a few days ago that I put in a third or fourth claim for new shoes or boots; and he just grinned; new boots, new boots!" "And if you can't walk tomorrow morning, you'll be put on light duty, to clean the muck out of the huts with Naumann II." "But I shall be able to walk. I don't feel it much now. Do you think it'll do the trick?" "Don't worry. It'll fester beautifully in two or three days. And if the doctor wants to know why you didn't report sick before, Barkopp will have to explain that chaps out on working parties don't have fathers and mothers and wouldn't be trusted very far by a medical orderly. Besides a man doesn't feel much

when his toes are always near freezing. Which is the plain truth." So saying he jerked the nail out of the wound, looked at it, threw away the shaft, and stamped the iron peg through the splintering surface of the ice. "And that's that," he murmured:

Wilhelm Pahl's natural colour had now returned; grey but not quite so bloodless than before. Cautiously, he tried to get up and walk; and he succeeded. He would limp a little, partly because he could not help it, and partly for the benefit of the sergeant and the doctor. The pair clambered out of the crater, shivered in the wind, and tramped onwards in their search for shells. "Then you really want to take Bertin with you back to Germany?" Pahl nodded. He ground his teeth as a twinge of pain ran through him. "Haven't you noticed how he's gradually giving in? He won't stand it much longer. And when he's been shaken out of his stupor, I'll eat my boots if he doesn't make a damned useful party man." "It won't be long, Wilhelm, before you won't have to eat any boots, neither roast nor boiled, you'll just lie and fatten. At the Danne-voux field hospital, where I was a regular guest at the back kitchen entrance, they've got a first-rate leg-doctor. And if I can pass the word to the kitchen sergeant that you're my friend, they'll feed you up good and proper."

Above them, defiant of the icy air, an aeroplane sped eastwards. Bending over the cockpit edge, with his camera poised, a young French sergeant peered through the arid morning light. He did not fail to notice the two ants crawling across the ravaged land; he could have brought them down with a rifle. But his business that day was to photograph Vilosnes-Ost railway station, which was now being used for the transport of ammunition. That was, indeed, only part of his task; which was to lead him further afield. The convolutions of the Meuse, the slopes and valleys of the hill country, had to be photographed too, to provide material on which his bombers would operate.



The young painter Jean Francois Rouard was not a blood-thirsty person. He would have much preferred to have been sitting in a warm studio in Montparnasse or Montmartre, following up the movement in French painting in which Picasso and Bracque had shown the way. But as he was now a soldier, he must make the most he could out of these barren years; one day he would even turn a bomb-switch, and watch the trucks blow up. Yonder beneath him lay his objective for that day; he sighted it, clicked the shutter, and the exposed plates dropped into the container. The line of the Dannevoux roofs close beside the railway, and the diminutive trucks, would come out very oddly in the print. That was the result of the perspective of aircraft photography, the laws of which, still largely unexplored, offered great possibilities for map-makers. They were useless for painting, that he knew; but from the military and aircraft point of view, the Sivry-Vilosnes-Dannevoux triangle with the convolutions and bridges of the Meuse pretended a knotty problem. The airman sent up to torpedo that ammunition train at night would have to keep his eyes skinned.

## CHAPTER IV: A WALK IN WINTER

A MAN's capacity for resistance is limited. It is often long before the individual realizes this; others usually notice it first. Certain types, in whose nature a sort of nostalgia for suffering has survived from childhood days, sometimes set the world aghast by their patience and endurance. But once a man's fortitude breaks, it breaks completely and suddenly, as the result of the imperceptible erosion of intellect and spiritual forces.

A man was strolling along the road from Vilosnes to Sivry. The golden noontide sunshine of late February fell gratefully upon him; he smiled, and whistled in reply to the twittering of the sparrows, yellowhammers, and tits. He had, of course, an errand to fulfil, he was not out to enjoy the beauties of nature; indeed the weather was much too cold, and the frost much too hard, for a country walk to be enjoyable. The cheerful pedestrian's errand was revealed by the objects in his right hand; an oval French hand-grenade, and a long, brass mushroom-shaped shell-fuse. "Take it over to Herr Knappe," said Sergeant Barkopp to Private Bertin. "But mind you hold them just exactly as I give them to you; you know what I mean." Private Bertin did know; these fuses were nasty things, they promptly exploded if they were shifted so that a needle inside them tilted back or forward according to the angle at which the confounded thing had lain since it was fired or thrown. Private Bertin set out with the two deadly objects held bravely in his right hand. The frost bit into his rigid fingers, and no glove was any use. As time went on Private Bertin began to find this attitude ridiculous; besides, he wanted to swing his arms, or to be

free to write down any idea or, more likely, any scraps of verse, that might well come into a man's mind as he walked along under such a soft blue sky. In a sudden resolve he put both the explosive machines into his trouser pockets. One in the right pocket, and one in the left, careful to deposit them at the same angle. But suppose he slipped and fell? The road beside the Meuse, frozen hard and ice-bound, made that not unlikely; moreover he would have to cross the river by Sivry on a long wooden bridge, a pontoon bridge to be exact, laid on boats and extremely slippery. Never mind. Private Bertin wanted to warm his hands, and he wanted to feel at ease, and comfortable. In the interval between taking leave of Sergeant Barkopp and meeting Bombardier Knappe, he wanted to figure as a private person. It was a glorious thing to be alone, and the freedom to walk and dream was all that the heart of man could need.

Thoughts came and went across his mind. The road followed the Meuse, an idyllic stream, edged by trees and bushes, and frozen hard. From the further bank came the clear rattle of gunfire or the crash of a bursting shell, both from a distance. The left bank was better known as Height 304 and Mort Homme; yonder lay French and Germans, face to face, and pelted each other with hand-grenades. However, it had been recently reported that Franz was bombarding Romagne, where he appeared to have taken a dislike to the railway station. No matter; Romagne was some kind of place where the thirsty men of Bertin's working party could still buy a few things such as synthetic dripping or chocolate. They were starving, and the whole army was starving. When, somewhere on the journey to Etraye, the field-gun limbers had been blown to bits, and there were dead horses lying about, infantrymen, sappers, gunners and A.S.C. men leapt out of all the surrounding holes and cavities on to the still warm carcasses, ripped the meagre flesh off the skeletons, and bore it triumphantly away in buckets and



cooking-pots to the small iron stoves, and there compounded a savoury stew. But, worse than this, on one occasion, this side of Etraye, all the occupants of the large hut had made a truly loathsome and forbidden feast; below them, a kilometre or so to the rear, lay a knackery, which gave off fetid odours all day long. The stale and bloated carcasses of dead horses were there burnt for manure, size, and grease, and the skins worked up into leather; it was forbidden to eat the flesh. But that flesh was eaten; the frost had kept it fresh, and, moreover, the men found an attack of meat poisoning with its accompanying agonies in hospitable preferable to ordinary life.

On this account all the bonds of fellowship had long since given way; any man who got a parcel of food was well-advised to eat it up as soon as possible; when he came back from work he would no longer find it in his rucksack or his bed, or wherever else he had bestowed it. Such was life in those days, and it had to be endured. Not that it would go on much longer. A miracle had happened in the meantime; by all reports, the crisis in Russia had ended; Russia had collapsed. The German thrust had not failed of its effect, the people had reached the limits of their endurance, they had put forward democratic demands, and that meant the beginning of the end. Pessimists like Halezinsky, wiseacres like Lebede, and sea-lawyers like Pahl did indeed maintain that the French and English and Japanese military missions would now get the upper hand and put new life into the war. But the Russians would not be such fools; they would tell their allies to go to hell, and throw up the game. No, we might well be home again by Easter, and if not then, at least by Whitsun. And Private Bertin smiled as he stumbled over the deep ruts of frozen mud.

Bertin had now reached the river bank, and he longed to cross the ice and save himself the way round by the bridge. He was sure he could slide admirably on his great nailed boots. And he waved a hand in salutation

to the ghosts of Goethe and Klopstock. Why not don a pair of skates and sweep downstream between the meadows and the alders, chanting verse in praise of skating? The French would be rather surprised if they saw a skater circling down on them, and shoot into Verdun! They would certainly be chivalrous enough to let him go his way unharmed. However, he walked sedately along by the river-edge as far as the entrance to the bridge, and then, close to the railing, across into the domain of another command. Halfway over, he threw some broken branches on to the sheet of ice, and listened to the dull echo as they rebounded. By the further bank, where a square of ice had been cut away, the black and icy waters could be seen noiselessly slipping past.

Since the break-up of the Steinbergquell Park, Bombardier Knappe had been living in a hut at the bottom of a gully overgrown with bare bushes and trees, in charge of the field-gun ammunition. He opened his eyes very wide as Private Bertin calmly handed him the two perilous burdens, asked him whether he had taken leave of his senses, and carried them gingerly into the tent he kept for such testing purposes, at some distance from the ammunition, telling Bertin to amuse himself for half an hour. Bertin ached for warmth and some hot coffee, which he was sure he would get among the handful of artillerymen who were stationed there at Knappe's orders. Little Knappe had always been thin, but his cheeks were more gaunt than ever; his beard had visibly grown. They're starved here too, thought Bertin, that's quite clear. But it was love of country and despair, not starvation, that ate the flesh off Herr Knappe's bones. He was an excellent engineer, and from a few newspaper photographs he had designed one of those new fighting machines recently employed by the Entente, equipped with caterpillar tracks instead of wheels, and capable of covering any sort of ground; he had sent in his designs to the Supreme Army Command, and had received, by way of Colonel

Stein, a politely scornful refusal; such toys might well be left to the enemy. Let them crawl into their iron dustbins, and bring their coffins with them; the German infantryman had no need of such contrivances; Herr Knappe had better do his duty and leave the rest to the Supreme Army Command. This communication upset Herr Knappe; since then he had slept badly, he had no appetite, and he had lost his taste for chess; how would it all end?

In half an hour Private Bertin, now comfortably warm, once more reported. The hand-grenade had vanished, but Knappe handed him the fuse with the tips of his fingers. "There," he said quietly; "just drop that into the water from the bridge. But take care to hold it just so, or you'll have had your last cup of coffee on this earth."

Somewhat sobered by the little man's stern tone and grave eyes, Bertin trotted off. On the bridge he did as he was bid, but as the water closed over the abominable thing, his thoughts began to wander as before. The artillerymen, who knew the country, had given him a piece of news of which none of them could know the importance; that almost undamaged village on the heights above Vilosnes-Ost—what was it called? It was called Dannevoux; and the huts on its outer edge above the railway line, where the Barkopp working party emptied and filled their trucks—just visible from the Meuse below, constituted the large field hospital of Dannevoux. There, in the immediate neighbourhood, lived Eberhard Kroysing.

He must go and see him, shake him by the hand, and discover how much of him had survived the December battle. Three days ago Comrade Pahl had been sent there with blood-poisoning in his foot, and this would provide good excuse; a visit to Pahl could be easily accommodated to the claims of service—to which Eberhard Kroysing had always attached such importance. . . . A good day, a good walk, a timely hand-grenade, and a nice cup of coffee and a talk.





BOOK EIGHT  
THE ELEVENTH HOUR





## CHAPTER I: THE BLESSED ISLAND

THE battle of Verdun had been fought and lost, though the fact was not openly stated. The *communiqués* had quietly revised the aims of the operation, invented the "battle of exploitation," and glossed over the truth; and the resulting fairy-tale was believed by a very large number of grown-up children. Raw materials and supplies for the necessities of life were stretched to the utmost, diluted, and adulterated. But what had just sufficed for the second winter, failed in the third. Butter was short, meat was short, and bread was very short, although it was eked out with bran and potatoes; few fresh vegetables of any kind, no bacon, hardly any eggs, and no *nudel*, millet, oatmeal, or groats available from abroad. Leather was giving out, as also linen and woollen cloth; clothes could only be had on production of a ticket, and of the material used in their manufacture the less said the better. When fruit disappeared into the jam factories, notices were put up everywhere encouraging the children to collect fruit kernels for their oil content; sunflowers were planted for the same purpose, and oil extracted from linseed and crushed beechnuts. Darning wool and mending thread had become very scarce and much sought after by the harassed housewives. Just as all manner of chemical compounds in tins and tubes figured as foodstuffs, paper in every form masqueraded as cloth, twine, sack, and boot-laces. Newspapers and cookery books were lavish of recipes for conjuring appetizing dishes out of insipid blends of potatoes, turnips, and brine. The physiologists and doctors pledged their scientific reputations that a full day's work could be done without vitamins, carbohydrates, or albumen—such was their contribution towards winning

a war that had long since been lost. Against the whole earth, against all reason, against the course of history and the progress of the last few centuries, Germany strove to win the war. The devilish instrument of war, the English blockade, was at last being countered—so the rulers of the land announced—by one equally effective: the destruction of all merchant tonnage on the high seas; in six months England would sue for peace. And the nation believed it. Unaccustomed to apply the standards of reality to the speeches of their masters, and demand a reckoning for squandered blood and wasted years, they toiled in the factories, fields, and cities, sent their children to be soldiers, washed with lye-soap and paper towels, travelled in unheated railway carriages, froze in chilly houses, sunned themselves in future glories and reports of victories they never presumed to question, mourned their dead, and were patiently ridden to destruction.

As Bertin climbed up to the Dannevoux hospital, with Sergeant Barkopp's permission, to inquire how Pahl was getting on (but mainly to see Eberhard Kroysing again), a last streak of rosy sunset-glow still lingered in the sky. From the further side a narrow road wound up the hill to the plateau, past a line of barbed wire and timber fencing, to the office-buildings of the hospital, which consisted of several wings round a large open space, and the group of huts towered up like a headland above the plain. It was after visiting hours when he arrived, and he was curtly reminded of the fact that they were placarded at the gate. After a good deal of explanation and fuss, he was finally admitted, by a back entrance, and up a small staircase, which led straight into a whitewashed corridor; he realized he was in the wing allotted to the serious cases, and his heart began to throb with apprehension. The sound of groaning shook his faint attempt at self-command; the place reeked with iodoform and lysol; and when a sister hurried past him with a covered bucket, the sudden proximity of decaying, suppurating matter brought him near



to vomiting. Through an open door he caught a glimpse of thick white bandages, a row of beds, a leg suspended in a pulley, and the backs of two sisters. All this he should have grasped in its whole grim significance and accepted for what it was; but he shut himself up like a mussel in a drain and sped on; at last, at the end of a second long corridor, he found what he was looking for—Ward 3, and Room 19.

Eberhard Kroysing greeted his rather shy and bewildered visitor with undisguised joy. He sat up in bed and beamed, reached out a sinewy arm and grasped Bertin's hand in his own powerful fist. "Bertin!" he exclaimed; "Well, my lad, this is your New Year's good deed, and you'll be richly rewarded for it in the next world which you've managed to dodge, like the rest of us, until now. You'd better unpack yourself from those lousy rags, you'll find some pegs outside the door." As Bertin inquired doubtfully whether things didn't get pinched even here, a shout of laughter burst from all three beds, which he could hear even through the closed door. But he obediently took off his head-protector and canvas jacket, and reappeared in his tunic.

The ward smelt of bandages and wounds, of cigarettes and soap. But it was warm, bright and clean—such an existence seemed to him idyllic, and he might have been pardoned for thinking that this was indeed a topsy-turvy time, when torment, blood, and wounds were the price to be paid for such modest comfort. But no such thoughts entered his mind; he was too deeply embedded in the world of war and its distorted values. Moreover, Kroysing immediately absorbed all his attention. He told him to sit down on the bed, introduced him to Lieutenants Mettner and Flachsbaauer as a friend inherited from his dead brother, and did not notice Bertin's starved, frozen, and distraught appearance. How was he getting on? First-rate, of course. What had happened? Well, he wasn't much of a hand at telling a story, that was Bertin's job. Yes, the last time they had met was on the other side of

Wild Boar Valley; since then he had had a pretty thick time.

They had not recovered Douaumont, but had dug themselves in quite comfortably on the Poivre heights, laid some very useful mines; but just when all was ready to give Franz the surprise of his life, the show started on the fifteenth of December, and stopped the joke. He, Kroysing, had obviously spent too much time in the fort and in trenches, and had rather forgotten the technique of doing a break, otherwise he wouldn't have had the bad luck to jump into too shallow a hole when the shells of the advancing batteries began to drop all round him. The crater was deep enough and steep enough in itself; but it was frozen to the brim, and a shell-splinter had just caught his right leg, which was still waving in the air, sliced it through the puttee to the shin-bone, though the splint-bone was still intact. He had hobbled to the dressing-station, and there dropped down in a dead faint. Well, he had paid his debts to the French in full, and could take it easy for a bit. He had the benefit of a first-class doctor and excellent treatment here in hospital, and for the time being he was perfectly happy and comfortable; the bone was healing nicely, and some damaged fragments had been neatly replaced by a bit of ivory—the head surgeon was something like a genius and had worked miracles. What he would do when he was well, he had not yet decided—time for that later on. And now what was Bertin's news? Above all what had happened to his old friend, Captain Niggel? Here they were under the Western Group Command beyond the Meuse—and got as little news from the Eastern Group as from Honolulu, although they had not actually crossed the river. Yes, said Bertin, he had plenty of news, and he began by relating Herr Captain Niggel's present glories and prospects. "The Iron Cross First Class," shouted Kroysing; "that cowardly little swine, who always had the wind up!" And he burst into a roar of laughter until he began to choke and almost coughed the eyes out of his head. Someone opened the door, an auburn head

appeared round it, and a pleasant voice cried in a Rhenish accent: "Now my young friends, don't you make such a row, or the Chief will be after you." "Sister Kläre," cried Kroysing, "stop a minute! I want to tell you something."

The sister waved a hand and said: "Later on perhaps," and shut the door. Kroysing sat up in bed, pale and wide-eyed. "Look here, I'm damned if I'll stand this!" said he. And he described to his two room-mates, front line men like himself, but infantrymen, how he had nailed that A.S.C. captain down in Douaumont, though he was just itching to do a bolt the moment he could. The two lieutenants jeered at his fury. "You've got a provincial mind," said Lieutenant Mettner languidly; "as I always suspected. Instead of getting excited because a skrimshanker gets a decoration, you ought to be surprised that you deserved your own." To which Kroysing replied venomously that he had not yet become quite so philosophical as that, but he had plenty of time to learn—Bertin sat gaunt and silent on the edge of the bed. Then, with a smile, he told the story of Lieutenant von Roggstroh's recommendation on his behalf. "So the creature is going to be promoted into the bargain?" he asked wearily, "and nothing's going to be done about it? Let him wait!" And he shook his fist. "Well, it serves you right, my boy. Why are you still hopping about after these lousy A.S.C. men? Don't you realize that His Imperial Majesty's Sappers need new blood, fresh material for future officers? A man of your capacity ought to be ashamed to stick to your job as though you were put into the A.S.C. by a sort of divine dispensation and not as a temporary expedient—no, my lad, I'm not sorry for you in the least. You can get out of your mess in five minutes. Put up an application to my regimental H.Q. at Brandenburg on the Havel, and leave the rest to me. Then you'll have a pleasant time to start with near Berlin, and your young wife will be quite pleased, I dare swear. You'll get a smart new tunic, and finish up as a sergeant—you've been twelve months at



the front." "Fifteen," corrected Bertin, "if you count the Lille forts." "And when we meet again, you'll be wearing a sword-frog like your friend Süssmann. Sergeant-Major Bertin, eh?—and Lieutenant Bertin very soon. Have a little sense, man!"

Bertin listened; what his wounded friend said to him seemed reasonable, indeed indisputable. Was there a better way of recovering his manhood? Lenore would, of course, give up the house and join him in Brandenburg, unless she used her father's influence to get him into a Potsdam regiment. . . . For a few flashing seconds he plunged into such fantasies; it seemed like an ascent into paradise out of this endless, unmitigated torment. . . . Kroysing noticed that his words had made an impression. "Come along," he cried, "say yes." Lieutenant Flachsbaumer, in the bed by the same wall, eyed the little scene with much satisfaction; persuasive devil, young Kroysing, thought he.

"My dear sir," came Lieutenant Mettner's voice from the opposite bed; "don't you let him talk you down. Wait till the time comes for changing bandages." So saying, he stretched out a shapeless, swathed stump of an arm towards Bertin and smiled a melancholy smile. "Mettner!" cried Kroysing, "I'm surprised at you. You wouldn't choke off a recruit, would you? It's an unpardonable thing to do." "Ah well," said Mettner phlegmatically, "pardonable or not—if you're going to set up as a recruiting-sergeant, you ought to be careful to put something in your victim's belly; am I right, sir?" Bertin confessed with a smile that he was uncommonly hungry, and that a spot of hospital diet would go down very well. And while he described the tinned soup that was served out to them day in and day out under the name of "Crown Prince Broth,"

Lieutenant Mettner went out of the room—a man like any other in his blue-and-white striped hospital overalls. "He's the only one of us that can walk," said Kroysing by way of excuse. With silent amusement Flachsbaumer contrasted his high-handed manner with the humble

demeanour of the emaciated private in the A.S.C., whom he was trying to tempt into impersonating an officer.

The one-armed man reappeared carrying a white basin and kicked at the door. Bertin opened it, thanked him, and sat down to eat. The soup was indeed beef soup, but the cow that had provided it had been a war cow, elderly and exhausted; its flesh, cut into cubes, floated lethargically in the precious fluid. And the ochrous yellow dumplings were war dumplings also; very few eggs had gone to their making, and their yellow hue was produced by colouring matter, probably saffron. And yet, taken altogether, well-salted and seasoned with parsley and leeks, it represented a dish the like of which Private Bertin had not tasted since his wedding leave; and as he ate, two tears came into the corners of his eyes—from shame at the delight that thrilled his being, and from humiliation and outrage at the thought that in former days only great music or poetry could rouse him as this stew had done; and also because he knew he would have been a better man had he always been fed like this. He sat with bowed head, the soup bowl on his knees, his face in shadow, and silently spooned the stew into his mouth, and each of those three men noticed how profoundly he was enjoying it; and they also noticed that his dark-brown hair, now grey over the temples, was getting thin on top.

But what was passing through his mind, no one guessed, or if so, they did not show it. "I knew," said Bertin, as he laid his spoon in the empty bowl, and looked up, "that I had reached the Island of the Blest." "But not with a cheap ticket," nodded Mettner, who was rather a corpulent young man. "Not so dear as yours," answered Bertin cheerfully. Lieutenant Mettner looked at him; "That remains to be proved," he observed thoughtfully. "What are you by profession?" "Barrister," replied Bertin. "Don't be so modest," interjected Kroysing; "he writes books, too." "Good," continued Mettner; "in me you see a mathematician, a pupil of Max Klein at



Göttingen, and not one of his least distinguished. Well, we've got plenty of time on our hands just now, so I tried to solve a simple cubic equation. My lad, I can no longer understand them. I can hardly grasp a logarithm, I have sunk so low." The others laughed; Mettner continued, unmoved: "You must realize, my young friend, that you have not merely lost your place in the running; you'll have to start afresh. Our hands have lost their skill, our brains are dulled, our judgment has deteriorated, and our technical knowledge has gone. We shall have to find out the meaning of civilization all over again, and that won't be easy, let me tell you. And you'll have lost all your respect for human life after what you've seen and done. Won't you find yourself reaching for a pistol when the landlord refuses to repair the shutters? I know I shall. And when the postman comes in the morning I shall want to throw my water jug in his face as I open the door. But you, my young friend, who've spent your time standing to attention and saying 'Very good, sir,' for the last two years, you'll end up as a sort of coolie. Let us assume that nothing happens to you, that you finish the war as a private in the A.S.C. When you are released you'll find you've picked up the habit of obedience. You won't grumble, whatever you're asked to do, and if you're asked politely and nicely, you'll melt away like butter. You'll find people who'll save you the trouble of making up your own mind. And if you do manage to get a job, in an office or somewhere, one fine day you will realize that in the war you've lost all the personality you've ever had, and you'll remember a man called Mettner who only lost his right arm, and then there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth, if not worse."

"My dear Mettner, you are a clever man, and we shall certainly hear of you one of these days. But you mustn't try to unsettle my poor young friend Bertin. And now you must bear with me if I say a word or two. I'm a fighter now, and nothing else, and if I'm through with the

sappers, I'll fix up something in the air force. Now, that young man has no longer the right to think of himself and his own character. For the present we must think of Germany. If a man has courage, loyalty, and some capacity for leadership, then that man's place is in His Imperial Majesty's Corps of Officers until the peace bells ring. As for what may become of him afterwards, let Germany see to that; his country won't let him down. Well, good night, gentlemen, and do you mind not listening for a few minutes? I have to discuss some private affairs with Bertin."

Flachsbauer and Mettner turned to the wall. Lieutenant Mettner had long since given up trying to influence Kroysing, who, though his senior, was such an incorrigible boy, and friend Flachsbauer, he knew, always agreed with the last speaker—at the moment with the fire-eater Kroysing. Well, he mustn't rush things, he thought, as he snuggled down into his blankets. It was a touch of cynicism on Kroysing's part, if not of something worse, to try to put this little bespectacled radical Jew into an officer's tunic; the fellow had a good head, though. . . . Well, time would bring good counsel, and now he must get a little sleep. After a good sleep one always took a more sensible view of things.

Bertin looked longingly at Mettner's back; the man's wound must have been like the awakening after a drinking bout; he would have liked to know more of him. He had recently been thinking a good deal about his Kroysing novel, with a feeling of vague disapproval, unaware whether it was really good or bad. Possibly it was bad—but he could not tell. These two years of soldiering had had their effect on him, his character and capacities had deteriorated. . . . What would be the end of him? He felt a sudden thrill of fear. . . . "Banish such thoughts!" cried an inner voice; "Save your own soul! If you begin to think, you will do your work badly tomorrow, drop a dud shell, and be blown to pieces. You have one duty, and that is to remain alive. Eat all the soup you can get,

mind what Lieutenant Mettner had said, and never be disloyal to yourself." . . . Montmédy? Oh yes, Kroysing was asking whether there was any news from Montmédy. Bertin passed his hand over his hair. He had not heard from there for many weeks. The papers, which Kroysing had sent him by Süssmann, had certainly been forwarded and would be there now. But since the accident to Judge-Advocate Mertens. . . . "Yes, it's always the wrong people that go west," growled Kroysing as he lay back, his nose sharply shadowed on the barrack wall. "Couldn't that damned bomb have dropped on Herr Niggel's skull? No, it must needs choose a decent fellow and one who could least of all be spared."

Bertin nodded in silence. Something tempted him to tell Kroysing of the death of one who could ill be spared; but he refrained, out of respect for the man who had thus departed. He had heard nothing more, he said untruthfully. "Then I know more than you do," said Kroysing. "There was a sergeant here not long ago, a fellow called Porisch from Berlin. A queer customer, but a decent sort. He first made it clear that Herr Merten's successor would be careful not to open the dead file; then he gave me a bit of advice." Bertin had mechanically stuck his pipe in his mouth and was sucking at it. He could see Porisch's face, rather puffy and pale, and that boisterous personage, Sergeant Fürth, the Pelican, and his billet at Romagne with the crossed sabres. Poor Christoph Kroysing's affairs had fallen into disorder; something must be done. "Porisch is clever," he said. "He is," growled Kroysing. "It was in the matter of a memorandum that he suggested I should address to the Judge-Advocate of the Western Group Command—we're under that lot here—Lychow Division, German Field Post so and so—I've got it all noted down. I was to apply to a certain Judge-Advocate Dr. Posnanski, confidentially in the first instance, describing the case briefly, citing you as a witness, and asking for an interview among the three of us, so that my unit shouldn't think me a



cantankerous sort of chap, in case the evidence wasn't up to military standards, such as they are." Bertin said that this seemed to him an excellent proposal. "I think so too," pursued Kroysing; "but before I get going, I must warn you. You may find yourself in trouble. A common A.S.C. private that gets up on his hind legs against a battalion commander is rather asking for it, good and plenty. I didn't know your address, besides I had my leg to think about, and among the Prussians I've learnt to wait. But now, as you're sitting here, I ask you—will you bear a hand?"

"Certainly I will," replied Bertin without hesitation. "I shouldn't dream of withdrawing my promise. And now I must get along; my friend Pahl is over in Ward 3." Kroysing reached out a hand; "You don't want me to say thank you, eh? All right, I know. Well, then, I'll send that document off tomorrow. Where can I get you?" Bertin, now standing up described his hut near the goods siding at Vilosnes-Ost, under the hill; it looked quite close on the map, but was in fact a mile or so downhill. After dark he was free at any time. "And what will happen," he said, as he buttoned his tunic; "if there's no legal case against Herr Niggl?" "Then I'll take up the chase alone and hunt the fellow down till he drops. So long as he lives, and so long as I live; I'll get him at last, if I have to drag him out of his orderly room, or his bed, or a latrine into which he has crawled. A man who kills a Kroysing will have to face the other Kroysing's pistol or his dung-fork, and that will be the end of him. And now go along to your friend, what's his name?" "Pahl," answered Bertin, "Wilhelm Pahl, if you could do any little thing for him, I would be grateful. Good night."

When Bertin had left the room, Lieutenant Mettner turned over on his back. "You'll be the ruin of that young man, my dear Kroysing, if he gives evidence against a captain." "May I put out the light, my dear Mettner?" asked Kroysing very politely. "Do, my dear Kroysing; Flachsbaauer's been asleep for a long time, lucky man."

## CHAPTER II: SUFFERING FLESH

"I'm so glad he's got a visitor, too," said Sister Mariechen, who was in charge of Ward 3, for light cases, other ranks. And there was a friendly look in her little blue eyes as she greeted Bertin. "He simply won't get well. He looks as if he'd got something on his chest. I wish you'd try to cheer him up a bit. Now you take my place for a moment," she added; "I'll fetch you a spot of food." And shaking her motherly little head she hurried out of the bleak ward to have a little chat with Sister Annchen and Sister Louise in the kitchen.

Pahl's bed stood quite close to the window; fourteen out of the eighteen beds were occupied. Over the central gangway hung three electric bulbs, the furthest one shaded by a blue cloth. "Sit down here, old chap," said Pahl feebly; "they're all asleep, and the girl's outside. I daresay we won't have another opportunity of speaking so privately."

Bertin felt not a little moved as he looked at the strangely alien face of compositor Pahl, as though he had never seen it before. It was like that of the victim on the medieval Descents from the Cross—livid and extinct. His cheeks were overgrown with a greyish stubble which emphasized the harsh chin, the crushed nose, and the bright eyes. Above his lips ran a thin moustache that repeated the eyebrows, and emphasized the set of the lips. He had drawn the blanket up to the chin, covering his short neck, and nothing remained of the familiar form but a drawn and agonized face.

"It's quite all right here," said Pahl. "So far, the folks have been very decent, and the food is eatable. But what

they made me suffer—that I can't get over. And I shan't, not as long as I live." Bertin shook his head sympathetically. This Wilhelm Pahl was really quite another person. What, then, had happened? Just exactly what had happened during the last year and more in nearly all the "light cases"; the doctor had promptly sliced off the great toe without more ado—and not before it was time. The blood-poisoning had already spread to the centre of the foot. Pahl had been laid on a bare table, tied down and held down, and then operated on. "When I was fully conscious, my lad; they spared me nothing." Indeed the chief surgeon roared at him for making such a fuss about a trifle; he should be glad to get off so cheaply; the leg was swollen right up to the knee and much discoloured, and if any more had to be cut away there wouldn't be any anæsthetic even then. However, the first onslaught was enough. But, to the persistent astonishment of the chief surgeon Private Pahl would not get well. He took a firm hold on himself when the bandages were changed, he clenched his teeth and did not utter, but he quivered all over and nearly fainted. There must be some inner obsession, explained Dr. Münnich to the assistants and the more intelligent among the orderlies and sisters, when someone mentioned the word "malingering." A psychic trauma, he called it, induced by childhood experiences connected with his deformity. But if the cure was to proceed the man must recover some interest in life, project his will forward, and try to dissociate it from the experience of pain.

"My lad," sighed Pahl; "it beats me to think that such a thing could happen in the world, that one man could inflict upon another such agony as that. I tell you it went right through me, up to my heart and brain and back again. . . . It hardly goes with the world of blue skies and sunshine and birdsong that we've all heard so much about. It belongs to a society, where men strike, and strike to hurt: to the under world, where a man is



damned from birth to fetch and carry for others, and waste the talents that should be at the service of humanity."

He was silent, and closed his eyes. "The slaughter bench," he went on, shaking his head. "It is always there, and in war it is everywhere. We were conceived and reared and trained to serve it, and on it at last we die. And that is what is called life." His breath came heavily, his hands moved over the coverlet, waxen pale; Bertin found himself looking for the red nail-wounds on the backs of them.

Tears trickled out from beneath Pahl's right eyelid. My God, thought Bertin, and I was crying over a dish of soup just now. "The slaughter bench must be destroyed," went on Pahl in an undertone while the others snored; "at least, we can stop the supply of victims." "If it is our power," agreed Bertin. "It lies in our power alone. Only the victims of injustice can abolish injustice. Only the oppressed can end oppression. Only those who have been under shell-fire can bring the shell-factories to a standstill. Why should those who profit by torture want to bring it to an end?" Bertin was glad to be able to distract Pahl's mind by contradicting him. No, he said; a sensible man of his own free will surrenders a third of his power, so as to be able to enjoy the remaining two-thirds of it in peace. Pahl denied this. It had never happened yet. Everyone preferred to keep three-thirds in his own fist, and died in its defence. And so the proletariat would be forced to come to a reckoning with the capitalist class. Bertin inwardly observed that pain stiffened a man; and he observed aloud that some capitalists were very decent fellows. Pahl, still in a whisper, waved the objection aside. Collective injustice must first be abolished. "When you've had a finger hacked off, you'll be pretty keen all your life to stop the practice of hacking off fingers. . . . Well, it's done me a power of good to speak my mind. I get sick of all these knackers and pious old bitches, and the lads in the beds who think about nothing but tomorrow's soup, and whether the sisters sleep with the

doctors or the officers. Gosh, I get wild sometimes. The ruling class has properly got us down, I must say."

Bertin looked furtively at his watch, but Pahl was not offended. A man who worked must sleep. "Mariechen will be back in a minute, we must fix up something quick." Would Bertin let himself be "applied for" and go in for newspaper work, if he, Pahl, could get him a job somewhere, when he got well and back to work? He could certainly work his way up through the printing side; and no authorities could afford to neglect newspapers, whose job it was to tickle up the national morale, morning, noon, and evening. Bertin stared into vacancy. Poor fellow—he was so convinced of the justice of his cause, and his power to get Bertin away. Had not Pahl underestimated the difficulty? "No," Pahl said impatiently. "And when you get to Berlin you'll come and make a speech at a subscription evening, or a staff meeting? And write me a few pamphlets that will make the munition workers sit up? Is that a bargain?" Bertin looked down at the drawn and waxen face of compositor Pahl, now more than ever a cripple, but resolved to resist the evil principle. Why were all these people tugging at him, he thought with inward irritation, Kroysing from the right and Pahl from the left. Why did no one leave him in peace to listen to his own inner voice? And he suddenly clenched the fist that hung down by his chair. He must find his own soul unaided. But Pahl misunderstood the gesture. "Good!" he whispered; "Bravo!"

Sister Mariechen came up behind them and Bertin rose. "If you can fix it, Wilhelm," he said with a smile. "Come again soon," said Pahl, with the same smile on his lips. And Bertin noticed the charm of his smile. The sister waved a little parcel at him with an air of gratitude; a bacon sandwich, she explained. "That is truly kind of you," said Bertin. "I'll eat it as I'm going down the hill." "Reward for a good deed," said Pahl.



### CHAPTER III: JUSTICE AND THE MAN

JUDGE-ADVOCATE DR. POSNANSKI reduced the gentlemen on the Staff of the West Meuse Army Group to despair every week by his extensive information and learned discourses. How were they to guess that the place where they were billeted, Montfaucon, had provided the poet Heinrich Heine with a theme for lampooning his colleagues Fouqué, Uhland and Tieck in his "Burgfrau Johanna von Montfaucon?" The genial lawyer did not realize that other people might know a thing or two. In any case, no one liked to have his ignorance exposed, and less good-natured officers than Lieutenant Winfried, the general's A.D.C., were a good deal offended by this talk.

"I've nothing against the Jews," growled, on one of these occasions, Brigadier-General von Hessta (a family which had migrated to the Prussian service from Hungary in 1835); "nothing, so long as they lie low and hold their tongues. But when they sit up like a dog before a sand heap, and cough up all this sort of stuff out of books—I won't stand 'em." When such remarks reached Dr. Posnanski's ears, the corners of his mouth, which were indeed wider apart than those of most men, twitched, he shut one of his eyes, peered up at the sky with the other, and dryly observed: "That comes of admitting upstarts to a share of our Brandenburg culture. They should wait until they've been as deeply dipped in the Prussian dye as we have. They weren't there at Fehrbellin, from Mollwitz to Torgau they fought on the opposite side, I didn't notice them at Waterloo either—and the little man thinks he has the right to air his views." His friends in general liked him for a certain philosophic calm, born of an insight into the slow progress of civilization, and the snail-like pace with which

it sinks into the inward consciousness of men. "If I thought that life beneath the changing moon would always look as it does now, I would breakfast tomorrow on rat poison and greet you tomorrow from the fourth dimension."

He made this remark one morning to Lieutenant Winfried. They were sitting in the cellar dugout in the Mairie at Esnes village, where they had both arrived on urgent business. The subject was the approaching transfer of the division—a very weighty matter. The Lychow Army Group had done its duty; Height 304 and the Mort Homme testified to that, and when it now returned to the Russian front, where, but for this interval, it had been stationed since the outset of the war, it could also record certain villages in its roll of honour. Meantime it had bored a few tunnels in the rock: the Raven, Gallwitz, Bismarck, and the Lychow tunnels; and the sector to the west of the Meuse would be left in excellent condition.

General von Lychow's men had to work, but it was all useful work, and this was as well known in his battalion orderly room as in the headquarters of his general staff, where a very dispassionate view is often taken of army commanders. And old Lychow still enjoyed the confidence of his rank and file. When, in 1917, the French occupied the left bank of the Meuse, and those tunnels were found full of dead Germans, many officers on the Crown Prince's staff expressed the view that this would never have happened under Lychow.

At the moment the two men were busied on two very different matters. It was Lieutenant Winfried's duty to inform His Excellency of the conditions in the sector next to be evacuated; Posnanski had to investigate a neatly executed burglary of the local provision stores, for which all units disclaimed responsibility. "They're all so hungry that it might have been any one of them," observed Posnanski gravely; "but I daresay the name of the place was mostly responsible. A German would think Esnes was to be pronounced like 'essen'; and that's what put it into their heads." "Posnanski," groaned Winfried;

"have you no sympathy?" "Eh? A great deal with my clerk, Adler, for instance, who is shaking in his shoes for fear he may be combed out soon." "Oh, is he? Then God help him." Posnanski solemnly wagged his bald and bulbous skull; "It's the loss of a good lawyer, and a double loss of a scholar. I suppose I shall have to look for someone else?" "There's plenty of choice," said Lieutenant Winfried. He was studying the record of a certain battalion whose commander was to be in charge of the rearguard. "Smaller than you might think. I look for certain moral characteristics and they don't grow by the roadside." "Seek and ye shall find," murmured the A.D.C., trying to decipher half-erased pencil reports: 12-18.XII.16, very critical days. . . . "I hope you can continue the quotation," said Posnanski, getting ready to go. "How does it run?" said Winfried, looking up. His light eyes encountered the dark grey ones of his large and genial companion. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." Winfried laughed. "I see. Have a confidential word with Sergeant-Major Pont; self in a reserve position." "Thanks very much," said Posnanski in high good humour. "And as you're in a generous mood; when can I have the car for a little official journey? Strange songs have reached my ears from Dannevoux field hospital." "Apply to Laurenz Pont also." "Good-bye, then," said Posnanski heartily.

As he climbed up the narrow stairway, very slowly in the half darkness, for his eyes were extremely short-sighted and astigmatic, he steeled himself against the painful interview to come; his clerk would be waiting for him up above, one Adler, barrister-at-law, formerly practising before the High Court in Berlin. . . . Hurriedly he banished it from his mind. Strange how things happened in pairs; on two successive days came two applications from the same field hospital. In the first, the head medical officer wanted to complain of the boots issued to a particular A.S.C. battalion, and asked for information as to the most effective way of doing so; in the second, a wounded



lieutenant asked for an interview regarding a serious miscarriage of justice in the case of his younger brother, now killed in action. As he grasped the handrail, and then made his way across the yard still strewn with wreckage, Posnanski pondered on the inextinguishable desire for justice implanted in the minds of men. In the middle of a war, when civilization had long since collapsed, and stood roofless like that Mairie yonder, mankind, tenacious and defiant in the face of gross injustice, fought desperately against outrages that would indeed have cried aloud to heaven in peace, but might now rank as trifling irregularities. And it was well that it should be so. That unswerving impulse might help to bridge the abyss, and create a world more fit to live in. "Good morning, Herr Adler. . . ."

Judge-Advocate Posnanski wore a uniform with a high collar, purple tabs, officers' shoulder-straps, and a dagger at his belt; his tunic set across his large person almost as tightly as that of Colonel Stein, and exactly similar leather leggings adorned his calves. Bertin accordingly stood to attention in his presence, which did not fail to put Dr. Posnanski against him.

The commandant of the hospital, Dr. Münnich, a man of fifty, with bristly grey hair and eyes of the same colour, had abbreviated his interview by producing the boots with which Private Pahl of the A.S.C. had been admitted to hospital; a hole in the centre of the left sole, and the right cap nearly worn away. Dr. Münnich was inclined to flush, which made his duelling scars stand out; his words were quiet and judicious, but any object of his wrath was torn up by the roots. Which made him, as may be imagined, a very uncomfortable but much regarded member of his circle, in peace time, at Liegnitz in Silesia; and in war, with his division, wherever it might be stationed. He conceived it to be superfluous to increase the population of the hospitals in this fashion; and he considered a battalion commander of that sort also

superfluous; and he wished he could impress the fact on that gentleman. But the unit was now under the "other bank." H.Q. in Damvillers. How could the abyss be bridged? Dr. Posnanski smiled. Between the Eastern Group and the Western Group there had been some tension, since His Excellency von Lychow had observed that no staff captain on the General Staff should have allowed the attack to be confined to the right bank, even though experienced corps commanders maintained that their Brandenburgers could do it on their heads. This robust criticism, expressed on the evening of Pierrepont, was conveyed piping hot, as is usual among friends, to the commander of the Eastern Group. He had merely sniffed contemptuously and asked what a Western rabbit was likely to know about operations in France; since when the two men had barely saluted, avoided any intercourse, and gladly put small difficulties in each other's way.

Dr. Posnanski was generally regarded as a man of peace; he knew the little ways of great men. If Excellency Lychow could be humoured, then Adler could easily escape from the clutches of the "murder commission." He would only need to be got on to the staff of a fighting unit, among the wireless operators or the telegraphists. If this could be achieved promptly and under the Excellency's benevolent eye, none of his well-meaning colleagues would have time to give him away. These boots, humorously introduced, might amuse the great man, who could then, perhaps, be induced to forward them by an orderly to the great man of the right bank, with appropriate comments. So Posnanski had the offending objects wrapped up, and promised to consign them, when possible, to the proper quarter. This done, he asked for a place where he could have a private talk with Lieutenant Kroysing. A private talk would be rather difficult, said the commandant; his huts were filled to the last corner. Then an idea occurred to him; one of his sisters, and the best

of them, too, had, when she joined them, asked for a room to herself—a corner however tiny, with a window and a bed, where she could be quite alone now and again. And as she was a colonel's wife, and commanded a certain influence as well, they had cleared out a small room where the hospital orderlies kept their buckets and brooms. A window was cut in the wall of the hut, and Sister Kläre had settled down there with much satisfaction. "One of the quiet, sympathetic-hearted ones, that have been through a great deal, and know how to handle other people," explained Dr. Münnich. But as everybody was as busy as they could be at the moment, the room would certainly be free. Fortunately the frost had broken a few days ago, so the place would not be quite so cold—of course there was no stove in it.

Sister Kläre was not exactly overjoyed when asked to lend her room; but she nodded, went in first, and turned a picture to the wall that was hanging over the bed; the crucifix at the head of the bed she did not touch. The patient Kroysing could lie down, one visitor could sit beside him, the other would have to stand. This other was of course Bertin, who had been telephoned for in good time—indeed he had just come in from work, dead-tired and half-starved. But the presence of the exalted personage, called Judge-Advocate Posnanski, so bewildered him that to begin with he could say nothing at all, and it was not till a few moments had passed that he stuttered out a halting request for a piece of bread and the permission to sit down. This too made a bad impression on Posnanski. This fellow-believer of his looked a repulsive object as he sat sprawling on the floor, ladling soup out of a bowl and crumbling bread into it; whereby he prevented better men smoking and making themselves comfortable. With his protruding ears and damaged front teeth, he was not exactly an ornament to the Prussian army. Moreover, Kroysing, in his eagerness over this decisive encounter, had laid such stress on Bertin's evidence



when he introduced him (. . . "And here is my friend Bertin, who met my brother only the day before his death, and will tell you all about him. . . ."), that Dr. Posnanski, never very good at catching names, had quite missed this one. Lieutenant Kroysing, whom Posnanski took to at once, began his story and the lawyer listened.

The little room was as cramped as a ship's cabin, and soon almost as full of fumes when the witness laid down his spoon. For Posnanski had put his cigar case with a gesture of invitation on Sister Kläre's little night table. Kroysing's deep voice vibrated in the clouds of smoke; Posnanski asked questions, Bertin listened. This was the story of Sergeant Kroysing and his brother, Lieutenant Everhard Kroysing, who had contended with the dwarf Niggel, in the caves and hollows of Douaumont mountain, only to have his victim snatched from his grasp as the result of the French attack, mistimed orders, and the all-pervading mist of that fatal day. Bertin was now smoking a cigar the like of which he had not smoked since his marriage, which seemed to belong to another world beyond the Acheron, where his kind and lovely wife was growing thin and ever thinner, for even gods and goddesses starved in that iron age. He seemed to remember some verses in the ancient Norse Edda, which he had read at the university, about a doom fulfilled: "Rain beat upon me, Dew dripped upon me, Dead lay I a long while." Did this apply to Christoph Kroysing, Sergeant Süssmann, or Paul Schanz? Here was he, squatting like a beggar upon the boarded floor of a strange woman's bedroom, nearly dropping asleep. . . . The weariness of spring, the waxing moon, and the goods train on the siding at Vilosnes-Ost station growing longer too. . . .

"Hm," growled Posnanski, "our witness has gone to sleep." And indeed Bertin had sunk forward, and was resting on his knees round which his arms were clasped. "Let him be for a bit," said Kroysing; "he has had a pretty rotten time." And he rapidly explained where and

how he had met Bertin, described his life as a navvy in the A.S.C., how badly he had been treated, and his own encounters with him. It was a ghastly existence for a barrister and a writer, it was never easy for any man to carry on outside his own caste. At the words "barrister and writer" Posnanski had sat up like a startled hare. "Bertin?" he repeated incredulously, in a tone of something like amazement: "Werner Bertin?" "Psst," whispered Kroysing, but at the sound of his name the sleeper started up as though he had been struck; "very good, sergeant," he muttered, and then, opening his eyes; "Dear me, I beg your pardon; we've been carrying damp chests of explosive on our backs, and one's boots get pretty caked with mud." Posnanski was still eyeing him with bewilderment. "Did you write the *Man called Hilner*?" "How did you come across it? The play was banned." "And *Love at Last Sight*?" "Well, really!" exclaimed Bertin, grown suddenly quite cheerful. "And *The Chessboard; Twelve Tales*?" "I think I must be speaking to the first reader of that book." "Yes," nodded Posnanski; "lawyers, stock-brokers, and women read everything, you know." Bertin laughed gaily; he had thought that schoolboys and students were the chief support of authors. In that case the authors would starve, observed Posnanski, and that must at all costs be avoided, for all sorts of reasons. "And now may I have your report, my dear colleague. Tell me all you know about Sergeant Kroysing."

When Bertin had finished, a silence hung in the room, as thick as the wreathing smoke. "I can't hold out much hope," said Posnanski. "As a private person I believe you and Herr Bertin implicitly. As a lawyer I must drop on the flaw—if you will excuse a shocking mixed metaphor—that the witness can only state that he was told this and that by your brother. But who can prove that your brother described the affair impartially? That he did not take a grossly exaggerated view, and imagine that a perfectly proper military order constituted a hostile perse-



cution? Had Herr Niggl signed, and then established to the satisfaction of the court that the signature had been extracted from him in circumstances that put his life in danger, than we could have countered the above objection, supported your brother's contention by Herr Bertin's evidence, and further statements from No. 3 Company, and have thus proved what in our conviction is true. Now mark my words," and he got up, and began to pace the half dozen feet between the window and the door, with his hands behind his back and his bald pate thrust forward; "we stand at the crossroads. Here is the truth; here too is what is both credible and convincing. I am perfectly satisfied that you have both described the affair correctly, and the affair itself, I grieve to think, is as clear as the sun at noonday. But to prove what you say to a hostile court composed of officers and men of the same class as the accused is a different matter."

Kroysing sat up in bed and let his bandaged leg dangle over the side, which he was forbidden to do. "And is the whole affair to peter out like this, uncelebrated and unsung? My God," and he almost spat; "then why on earth does society support the legal profession?" "The fact that society does support it," retorted Posnanski; "and supports it in comfort, as you insinuate, shows society's good sense. But don't let us lose our tempers, my dear lieutenant, we must meet each other halfway; as you know, a good compromise is half the game; give me the file of the preliminary inquiry; I will send for the papers and look into the case. In the meantime consider whether you want to bring a charge against Niggl and his accomplices for abuse of military authority resulting in a man's death. Eat well, sleep well, devote yourself to getting fit and strong again, and then write and tell me what you have decided. If you want to fight for justice—carry on; I shall be with you, and so will our young friend here, although he risks more than all of us. But it will be a hard fight. If we fail to prove our case you will be in

a very unpleasant position, and you will also be marked men for the rest of your lives. Now, get me the file."

Kroysing raised himself, his undamaged foot in a slipper, his wounded leg bandaged up to the knee, and his hinder parts slung from the armpits between two padded supports—a pitiful sight for Bertin's eyes; Eberhard Kroysing on crutches!—and left the room. "Now as regards yourself," said Posnanski, in a business-like tone. "You will, of course, not remain where you are. Are you fit for active service?" "No," said Bertin; "I was turned down long ago owing to my eyes and my heart." "Excellent! I have to give up my clerk. I shall apply for you." Bertin sat there wide-eyed, in his overcoat and muffler, and his shabby cap on the floor beside him. "But," he muttered; "I—I shouldn't be up to the work. I could hardly understand when you were explaining the case." "My friend," said Posnanski, "say yes, quickly. Such a chance doesn't come along every day. Can you type? No? Well, you will learn in a fortnight. Give me the address of your unit. I shall be glad to think this afternoon won't have been altogether wasted after all."

As Bertin still stared at him in bewilderment—could so marvellous a thing have happened in so simple a fashion? (a highly nervous subject, thought Posnanski sympathetically)—he added; "but please don't mention this to anyone, otherwise, as we superstitious people know, it will go wrong. How much leave do you get in that jacket?" "Four days," replied Bertin. Here, beneath this hand, was still a deal floor-board; he was not dreaming.

"May I," he said slowly, "express my gratitude to you, sir, by presenting you with a narrative of my meeting with young Kroysing? It is," he added in a half-guilty tone; "written in the form of a story; that is, it was to have been a story. It's the only thing I have tried to write since I have been in the army. If you would care to keep the few pages. . . ." Posnanski gave him a hand; "I can't accept presents, my dear sir. But I'll be sure to read it."

## CHAPTER IV: SISTER KLÄRE

A KNOCK came at the door. Sister Kläre appeared, but recoiled in exaggerated horror, cried (in Russian) "*Boshe moi!*" and asked in broad Rhenish whether there was anyone else behind the smoke-cloud, flung open the window, and threw back the makeshift tarboard shutters. "You'd better turn out the light," growled a deep and angry voice; "if you want to see the view." And Kroysing clicked the switch. "You aren't in Douaumont now," said Sister Kläre sharply; "the French airmen have got something better to do than mess about here." "Pretty girl, isn't she?" said Kroysing apologetically to the others.

The landscape behind the small square window lay drenched in the soft radiance of twilight. Beneath them the valley, veiled in the mists of the spring night: beyond it, the rising moon, stars glittering through the haze, and the curves of the Meuse shimmering between banks flecked here and there with sharp-cut shadows. Only a faint flicker, a faint rumble, betrayed the front line. All four crowded round the little aperture and breathed in the pure air of approaching spring. The Meuse still lay in frozen splendour, but the warm breeze, softly fragrant from the south, was not to be mistaken. Sister Kläre folded her hands: "I wish the world hadn't gone mad," she sighed. "I always have to remind myself that that's not the Moselle, somewhere behind Trier. Why don't the enemy give up? Then we could all be home by Easter, and start trying to forget the war." "Better not," said Bertin, and, at Sister Kläre's look of astonishment, he added: "Forget, I mean. We forget things much too



quickly." He said no more; he knew he would fail to find the words he wanted. "No, no," said Posnanski; "we shan't forget the war; we shall turn it into a pretty patriotic story for posterity." "I daresay you will," blinked Kroysing; "but before you do, let me relate my modest experiences. In the spring of '15, on the Flanders front, we lay opposite the English, quite close to them, while we were constructing our gas containers; we had the honour to be the first gas company. From February to April we slept in the pleasing proximity of large iron containers; on one occasion one of them leaked, and next morning I observed the damage in the shape of forty-five sappers, blue and dead. And when we burst the beastly things for the first time on the exercise ground, just to try them out, and carried the pieces home, every man that touched them died in the end. They took some time to die; when I went into Julich hospital with my first wound I found some of them still there. They were dying, no one quite knew how or why, the doctors were all up in the air about it, but die they all did at last. Terminus, all change here. Yes; so we waited in our waterlogged trenches for a favourable wind. We had to keep on shifting those containers, they quickly got bogged in the clay. There were no such things as gas masks in those days, we were expected to protect ourselves against the beastly stuff by stuffing cotton-wool up our noses. The Tommies flung cheery notes across, asking when the stink was going to start, and said they were bursting with curiosity to see the show. Then the east wind came, we blew off our gas, and the Tommies were no longer curious; they were all blue and blackened corpses when we got into their trenches. Blue and black. Tommies and Frenchmen, all friendly side by side. On the Poelkapelle bicycle track there were certainly five thousand dead, and the lucky ones, who hadn't swallowed much of the stuff, and were still choking and spitting; they passed out at Julich, just quietly and gradually, without any sort of fuss. Nasty little yarn, isn't

it? Well, remember that in the next war the only ammunition will be gas." "Really, Kroysing, you're incorrigible. Kindly remember that I spend my days looking after your disgusting wounds, and let me soothe my mind by looking at God's landscape now and again in peace. The next war? There won't be a next war. If anyone starts a war after this massacre, women will beat him to death with broom handles." "I trust that God may hear your words," boomed Posnanski. "There will be no more war," nodded Bertin; "this is the last. Our masters can fight the next war on their own; we shan't be there." "I'm sure you won't," cried Sister Kläre, as she flicked a tear out of her eye with a forefinger. She had been thinking of her husband, Colonel Schwersenz; that once distinguished staff officer had been gradually falling into a deeper melancholy mania since the winter of 1914, and was now being nursed by her mother, old Frau Piddert, in a little hunting lodge in the Bavarian Allgau.

Only the commandant of the hospital knew Sister Kläre's name and story. She was generally held to be the rather dashing wife of a captain somewhere on the Eastern front, and was more than suspected of an affair with a very exalted personage. Kroysing, towering above them all, looked cynical, and shrugged his shoulders. "So we have the honour of attending the obsequies of the war. Well, war had a short career: he was born some five thousand years ago among the Assyrians and ancient Egyptians, and we are to put him in his coffin. The people who ran the Thirty Years War, the Seven Years War, and the Napoleonic War were a pack of bunglers. We—are the chosen instruments of peace. Ha!" "Yes," said Sister Kläre and Bertin defiantly and in unison. But as he spoke, Bertin saw the inner vision of a grave, round which they were all standing in the guise of gravediggers, with mattocks in their hands; Kroysing, the sister, the corpulent judge-advocate, and he himself, outlined against a cloudy sky, hacking at clods of earth. But below them was

the curve of a swollen belly, a bloated, hairless face, and the bulging cheeks and closed eyes were set in a mysterious grin: whether that grin was significant of menace and disaster, or relief at its own dissolution, none could say.

Meanwhile Sister Kläre closed the shutters, and then the window. "Now switch the light on, and then I shall turn you out," she said. All blinked as the white walls flashed forth. "We thank you for your kind hospitality," said Judge-Advocate Posnanski, bending over Sister Kläre's hand, a long and capable hand, hardened by work. From the undernurse's nun-like cap a few strands of flaxen hair had strayed, and beneath them shone two starry eyes, and two soft lips, obdurately closed. A devilish pretty little thing, thought Kroysing, what with her Madonna face and that merry mouth of hers. She's certainly up to something with the Crown Prince. He felt a sudden desire to get into her good graces. "What should I get, Sister Kläre——" "Nothing at all but a box on the ear," she blazed at him "——if I venture to present you with a little surprise? Permit me to introduce to you, in my friend Werner Bertin——" Sister Kläre stopped with parted lips in the middle of her room, with both hands outstretched in front of her in a faint gesture of refusal—"the author of the well-known novel *Love at Last Sight*."

Sister Kläre's experienced eyes surveyed Bertin's grey face, his drawn cheeks, his bristly chin, the rim of dirty sagging skin above his collar, and his general shabby and verminous appearance. He smiled awkwardly, and she noticed that one front tooth was missing, and one damaged, and his cropped hair was growing thin on the crown. And yet something in his eyebrows, his forehead, and his hands, convinced her that Kroysing was serious. "So it's you!" she said in an undertone, and gave him her hand; "well! And my friend Annemarie wrote to me from Krefeld three months ago that she had met the author, who was a lieutenant of Hussars and a charming fellow." At this, Bertin began to laugh indignantly.



Posnanski and Kroysing laughed at his indignation, and they all left Sister Kläre's cell like a cheerful party breaking up. Now the place was fit to sleep in again, she said; and Bertin must come and see her tomorrow morning, when she would be off duty. "Well, we shall all meet again," said Posnanski; and they parted.

## CHAPTER V: COUNTER-PROPOSAL

AS the judge-advocate got out of his car in the park of Montfaucon Castle amid the cheerful song of blackbirds, he had, after a brief reflection, decided to suppress Private Pahl's boots, as being likely to put difficulties in the way of his application for Private Bertin's transfer. However, he might have spared himself these reflections. Such documents sometimes linger by the way, and sometimes travel with amazing speed. This one, as it happened, was promptly passed on to Group East, where it was closely scrutinized by jealous eyes, and a blue-pencilled query scrawled across it in the A.D.C.'s office: was A.S.C. battalion X/20 in a position to dispense with any of its rank and file? Which was intended, and understood, as a hint that the reply should be in the negative. Apart from the usual petty hostilities, the transfer of the Lychow Division to the Russian front had a decisive effect; for the rivalry of the two fronts was at its height, which the new Supreme Command had not yet succeeded in appeasing; and the two staffs took a delight, as General Schieffenzahn observed, in "queering each other's pitch."

When the imposing folio sheet, stamped with the green and violet official seals of the two embroiled army groups, was laid before Major Jansch, he began by taking a yellow sweet out of his mouth and laying it on a saucer on his writing-table. When he grasped from the courteous but formal typewritten text, that someone was after one of his men, and this man in particular, he gave such a snort of fury that Diehl, the clerk, felt his heart grow cold within him. However, the blue-pencilled query, the intent of which he forthwith grasped, calmed him down. "Take



this down," he said to Diehl, got up, laid his hands behind his back, paced up and down the room, and, after a great many emendations and omissions, dictated the following text: " 'I have the honour to point out that No. 1 Company, is scattered in working parties large or small between Mureaux-Fermes and Volones-Ost. It is so weakened by casualties and illness, that the departure of a single effective man without the provision of a substitute is inadmissible. The battalion proposes that Private Pahl, at present at the Dannevoux Field Hospital, should, when discharged, be detailed for the desired duty with the court martial. P., by profession a compositor, is a most useful man, is an excellent typist, and through the loss of a toe can be employed only on office work.' That will give the dirty dogs something to think about."

Diehl went out of the major's room, and down the stone steps to the typing room. He had to steel himself to endure his servile existence under this snappish old candy guzzler until the war was over, and he could get back to his wife and child in Hamburg. He liked Bertin, and he wished him well. He would of course be better off anywhere than among Sergeant Barkopp's dud-collectors; but now he was going to be done out of an excellent chance, with that smooth and sanctimonious insolence with which great men could be treated by one who was sure of support from those who were not less great. Diehl stopped at the landing window, half way down the stairs, looked at the court martial's communication, which he had been the first to see and read early that morning, and then stepped out into the pale spring sunlight. He knew nothing of the collision between the two Army Groups, the inquiry from the East Group seemed to him sensible, though the guile of Jansch's reply was obvious at once. There was no help for it, he decided, as he walked on; Bertin was a marked man. He had obviously used some influence to get his application made. If he was informed at once of this refusal, he might just possibly think of some way, though

Diehl could not conceive what he could do. Diehl was an elementary school-master, a man full of respect for books and writers of books, and he felt that he must help Bertin in any way possible. As he opened the door of the stuffy office, that reeked of men and tobacco, his resolve held fast. He opened his typewriter. But before he slipped the folio page of the Western Group court martial paper through the rollers, he laid a thin duplicate sheet beneath it and a sheet of carbon in between the two, as indeed he usually did. If someone sent this duplicate to Bertin in the midday interval, the recipient would know what to expect. The typewriter tapped, tinkled, and tapped again; the sheet was taken out, and slipped into the file for signature, and the duplicate was laid by in a drawer. Diehl the clerk did not notice he was breathing rather harder than usual.

Meanwhile Major Jansch telephoned to his friend Niggel. . . . Yes, they had become friends; for them, the Main frontier had ceased to exist, Prussia and Bavaria were members of one empire, now devoted to the overthrow of its malignant adversaries. Every morning they exchanged congratulations on the merchant tonnage lately sunk, and listened to the British world empire cracking within its great ringed fence. Every morning they agreed that French morale was weakening, the Italian attacks grew more futile, and American bombast could be treated with contempt. The Russians had been brought to their knees, and would vanish from the map of Europe; the revolution had disposed of them once and for all. They would give no more trouble in the Balkans or in the Near East. Victory was within the grasp of Germany; for when the concentrated might of their armies did indeed appear on the western front, and that of Austria-Hungary on the southern front, the war was won; and then would come the turn of wirepullers, Freemasons, stock-jobbers, Jesuits, Socialists, and Jews. Niggel listened with profound admiration to his sagacious friend. He heartily agreed. There was certainly

a rod in pickle for the Freemasons and the Jews. Yes, replied Herr Jansch, in a tone of solemn triumph: the beggars stuck together like pitch and brimstone, and what they could do if they were given a chance was made only too clear in the horrors of the Russian revolution. The Jewish bankers had, in fact, at the instigation of the *Alliance Israélite*, plotted the overthrow of Tsarism, and ten years before had armed Japan against the Russian empire. On that occasion they had failed; they had learned a lesson and did not mean to fail again. Yes, said Niggl naïvely; but Germany had then backed the Jews against Russia? Major Jansch, nonplussed, said that that was not quite a just view of the position. Cunning and treacherous as the Jews were, they were too stupid to see that in the Germans they had met with their match; we saw them for what they were, and would take care that they should be made to disgorge their profits this time. That very day, he, Jansch, had found it none too easy to repel a Jewish manoeuvre. There was a Jew, scandalous as it might seem, who held the post of judge-advocate, Group West. No sooner had this gentleman discovered a little Jew author in an A.S.C. labour company, than he wanted to get hold of him, no doubt intending to displace a brave German in his favour, and the unsuspecting army commander had bestowed his blessing on the scheme.

But they had come up against someone with his wits about him, and Herr Bertin would find it harder than he thought to shirk a useful job of work. It was the same man, if the captain remembered him, who had been the central figure in a pleasant little scene. On that occasion he had wanted to go on leave, this time he was up to another little dodge. Captain Niggl, soon to be Major Niggl, at the other end of the line, cleared his throat, stuttered some reply, asked his friend to excuse him for a moment while he spoke to someone who had just come in. The conjunction of "Bertin" and "court martial" temporarily took his breath away. All too clearly he saw



before him the dreadful vaults of Douaumont, the gaunt figure of that villain Kroysing, who—alas—had not been killed, but lay abed in hospital with a harmless wound in the leg. Damn him; and he inwardly prayed to the Holy Crucifix that the brute might never get out of bed again. He would put up a wax candle as thick as his arm in the Ettla monastery or the Pilgrimage Church at Alt-Ötting, if Kroysing, and all his gang, might be brought to ruin. Then he called up again; he was indeed glad to hear the major had got even with the Jews.

Herr Jansch, shifting his lollipop into his left cheek, described with a chuckle the substitute he had suggested, an excellent fellow now wounded and in hospital, a compositor by profession, and a Christian. Excellencz Lychow was shortly moving to the East. In a fortnight, or even in ten days, the affair would be dead and buried.

## CHAPTER VI: NIGHT PIECE

ON that same morning Dr. Posnanski received the Kroysing papers from the Montmédy court martial, and the reply from A.S.C. Battalion X 20, forwarded through Staff Records. Every man in Montfaucon who came in contact with that document, laughed as he read it. Sergeant-Major Pont laughed as he put it into the judge-advocate's tray, the judge-advocate himself laughed, and so did his clerk, Sergeant Adler, gloomy as he was feeling; and the orderly, Gieseke of the Landsturm, roared with laughter as he inspected the document, and observed: "That's a pretty bit of work. Stout fellows, the Prussians, bless 'em!"

The only man who did not laugh was Lieutenant Winfried, Excellencz Lychow's A.D.C. and nephew. He was furious at this crass impudence on the part of the A.S.C. major to his uncle, and above all at the fact that this refusal would have to stand; "Dr. Posnanski needn't think we're going to hang around here on account of his business; I might have taken the matter up in the ordinary way, on another occasion; but at the moment I've no time to start out on the warpath against Group East. He'll have to get another man." Sergeant-Major Pont, a large man, master builder from Kalkar on the lower Rhine, smiled a knowing smile as he said: "I don't fancy we shall have to deprive ourselves of Herr Bertin, sir. I've got an itch in my nose that tells me so." And he passed a thumb over that straight and solid organ. "Lawyers can work magic." In proof of which he told the story of an advocate in Cleves, who had fought for a year and a half with a firm of brick-makers in Kevelaer over two truckloads of bricks, and almost reduced it to ruin.

Lieutenant Winfried was glancing through memoranda

on the encampments for the transfer of the division; "Well, Posnanski will have to handle the case himself. I shan't trouble His Excellency with it. He's already sniffing the lakes and pinewoods of his beloved East. And if the French don't get busy and upset everything we'll be away from here in a fortnight, and Group East can—shed a tear over us."

Sergeant-Major Pont thrust out his lower lip, muttered that they would soon be a long way from the Rhine, and boldly suggested that he might be allowed a brief official trip to say good-bye to his mother. Lieutenant Winfried observed briefly that the sergeant-major's wish was God's wish, and merely added that he hoped to see him back five days before the staff moved off. Pont expressed his grateful thanks, and immediately started to figure out on the railway map where he and his wife Luise, to whom he was devoted, could most conveniently meet.

Judge-Advocate Posnanski was sitting after dinner at the round table of a rather chilly drawing-room, that really belonged to Jovin the chemist, and his wife, but which the Town Major's office at Montfaucon had taken from them and assigned to the judge-advocate as his billet. The room was crowded with solid and old-fashioned furniture and ornaments; the lamp stood on an alabaster pedestal, and shed a mellow light through a pleated-silk shade. The pictures on the walls were rather crude likenesses of Madame Jovin's family—peasants, who, at the partition of the great estates immediately after the Revolution, had not been slow to seize their opportunity. The Jovins had one son in the field and a married daughter in Paris, in constant peril from the enemy Zeppelins. Their intercourse with their compulsory lodger was limited to a dozen words daily. But they found this German officer, in contrast with some of his predecessors, tactful and not unsympathetic. From time to time Madame Jovin remarked to her husband that his habits were almost French—praise which Monsieur Jovin felt obliged to



qualify with an "*O la la!*" But Herr Posnanski spent a great deal of time at home, drank black coffee, and red wine in the evening, he loved books, and took work back to his rooms, the arrangement of which had remained unaltered; he was domestic, economical, temperate, and industrious; and but for the abominable habit of smoking cigars, and infecting the curtains and blinds and carpets with the ineradicable reek of tobacco, Madame Jovin could not have desired a more agreeable intruder for the duration of this awful war.

Posnanski, in an old brown tweed jacket, from time to time laid his cigar in its white holder on the pewter ash-tray, and stretched out his slippered feet under the table; the only thing military about his appearance was his trousers, long grey trousers striped with red. His powerful neck stood out above the unbuttoned coat collar and open shirt; and Madame Jovin's elegant walnut table was scattered with the Kroysing papers. The Bertin affair glimmered on his mental horizon; it might be settled later on, or it might not. But as the intellect was out of favour, and men of good will were not counted in high places, there was probably nothing he could do. It was a lawyer's vocation to be acquainted with injustice, and not to let it shake his self-command. But the Kroysing case shook the very foundations of organized human life. He had established its legal aspect in conversation with the brother and accuser. In these papers there was no definite evidence that the younger Kroysing had been purposely put out of the way because certain comestibles—meat, butter, bacon, sugar, and beer—had been converted to the use of those for whom they were not intended. Had it been possible to take the case up properly, he would have questioned the rank and file individually, forced the N.C.O.'s to a confession, and then astutely cross-examined the orderly room, the company commander, and the battalion commander on the usual duration of outpost duty, and the intervals of relief; he would then have gone

into the question why young Kroysing had not been given leave to appear before the court martial, and the papers had been packed off to Ingolstadt. All this established, the witness Bertin could have been produced, and young Kroysing's last letter and testament read aloud. And then, at last, he was enough of an orator to have convinced the court that such dealings could not possibly be overlooked.

Dr. Posnanski was confident he could have won his case triumphantly, if he had had the force of publicity behind him, and public interest in the urgency of the issue: in other words, in peace time. Peace! Dr. Posnanski leaned back in his chair and snorted. In peace time this Kroysing case would have been an avenue to triumph and to fame. Was such a case possible in peace time? Instead of the A.S.C. battalion, conceive a large industrial concern, which clothed and fed its workers through its own canteens and shops, housed them and doctored them; the opportunity for corruption and intrigue at the expense of the majority would be no less than in the Prussian army. Array young Kroysing in the overalls of an engineer, placed so continuously in dangerous work that the unwelcome knowledge he possessed was extinguished by a so-called accident, such was the exact aspect of the affair, as Posnanski was convinced it had taken place. But woe to the employers within whose authority such things come about. In a well-conducted state, they would find themselves in jail; in a state, when the proletariat was active and discontented, there would have been an upheaval that might well have threatened the structure of society; and in England or France, the government would have had to resign. Even in Imperial Germany such a case would have produced far-reaching political consequences; none of the ruling groups would have dared to back the guilty parties. It was easy enough for an experienced Berlin newspaper-reader to imagine the attitude of the Conservative, Liberal, and more especially the Social-Democratic press on such an incident. . . .



It was very silent in the house. Somewhere a mouse rustled behind the heavy curtains. Posnanski drank a little wine—he used a lion-clawed porcelain goblet, in which the Bordeaux wine looked more richly red—and he rose to continue his meditations pacing up and down. The picture was correct enough for industrial areas and great cities. But how would the case look in the country district, in the backwoods of the great estates and properties in West Prussia, East Prussia, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg?

He pondered, his hooded eyes half closed, gazing up at a woven panel depicting a sylvan eighteenth-century scene, in which he could make out nothing but a web of variously coloured meshes, until it gradually revealed itself as a representation of a human foot poised on a flowering plant. In an agricultural setting, the exposure of the truth would be more difficult, and more perilous for the lawyer and the witnesses; some of them would be discredited Jews, but the final issue would be the same.

The conservative and Protestant landlords of the eastern Elbe, the Catholic feudal lords of Bavaria—they too would lend no support to such imprudent underlings, and would, in the last resort, sacrifice their incompetent officials. But in war, injustice came to fulness, as practised by nation upon nation, and towered so mountain-high that a bucketful of muck passed quite unnoticed. So deeply were the interests of bare life involved, the question of mere existence and survival for the ruling classes, and, ultimately, the ruled as well, that in plain practice the claim of the individual to life and honour had to be adjourned until further notice: such issues were, in some sort shifted on to a siding until the services of civilization were restored. That, of course, signified a relapse into the times of the migrations, a rejection of the Sinaitic Law.

Niggli's callous knavery, his trafficking with human life, was, with equal shamelessness (if the mutual recriminations of the war bulletins were to be believed), at the time practised by the nations on the largest scale, and on every

front; and against such a background individual cases faded into insignificance. And, as all the groups concerned daily pleaded that they were fighting for their very existence and the survival of human culture, an unpretentious personage like Dr. Posnanski could hardly expect much attention at the moment. All he could do was to advise Lieutenant Kroysing to wait till the end of the war, get the names and addresses of as many of his dead brother's comrades as possible, and then put up his case, when the German people might be disposed to bethink themselves of such as Christoph Kroysing.

The dead youth now haunted Dr. Posnanski's mind. He had read and marked his letter. Then, in the deepening silence, he had gone through the black exercise book containing notes and jottings, fragments of verse, isolated thoughts, opinions, impressions, and queries. Posnanski had begun to study this notebook for reasons connected with a hobby of his own; he was an amateur of shorthand, which he regarded as a most excellent invention; he knew all the systems and methods of abbreviation, and while still at school had excelled at deciphering strange handwritings. The very contours of those pencil strokes brought their message. An honest man had written in this book, and the contents of every page confirmed that good opinion. Young Kroysing had been somebody. He had stood up against injustice—an open sore on the body of the community that he loved.

A deep and holy patriotism was eloquent in this young man. He had no heroic vision of his nation, saw its weaknesses; "I don't understand," he complained in one passage, "why our people are so docile. We are not dull-witted nor without a sense of justice; indeed, we are almost femininely sensitive to any kind of injury. Can we be a feminine nation? Is it our fate merely to know where our trouble lies, and merely to express it? I hate to think so." He realized clearly that the high moral culture of the great German writers and thinkers had its

root in the nation; "but this root seems to me a long and very fibrous root, that after many convolutions may somewhere send a lovely plant up to the light." In another place he lamented that "the beauty of life, expressed in a sunrise, a starry sky, or the common blue of day, seemed to have no influence at all on the habits of the Germans. For a few minutes they enjoy the face of nature, and then relapse into practices that might equally have been evolved in subterranean caverns; whereas Goethe or Hölderlin, and Mörke and Gottfried Keller too, seem to be always aware of the world of plants and trees, of the winds and clouds and streams. The fragrance of the countryside goes with them into their studies, and offices, and lecture rooms. Therefore are they free. Therefore are they great."

Yes, thought Posnanski, that is a very true and very important remark. Moreover the problem has nothing to do with the economic side of life. It is a pity one can't discuss these matters with you any more. Men like you will be sorely needed. Your verse is charming and sensitive, but very young. Still, let us assume that Cadet Hölderlin, Sergeant Heinrich Heine, Lieutenant von Liliencron, Sergeant-Major C. F. Meyer had been killed at your age—whether by guile or otherwise, makes no matter; or that young Ensign von Hardenburg had died at fourteen of a chill caught on a route march—not to mention Trooper Schiller, drowned at eighteen while swimming a Swabian mountain stream. Would their legacy to literature have looked very different from yours? Certainly not. And yet the world without them would have been a poorer and a sadder place, though we should never have known what we had lost. "Yes," he sighed; "it is a doubtful problem, and I'll give a taler and five pfennigs for a solution—which comes first, the man of genius, or the nation? and the answer does not seem to alter the fact that men like Niggel have a free hand to pursue their villainies. However, let us now see what came of Herr Bertin's meeting with Christoph Kroysing."



## CHAPTER VII: THE KROYSING STORY

HE proceeded to open the manuscript that Bertin had given him. Then poured himself out another glass of wine, lit a slender Dutch cigar, looked rather ruefully at Bertin's slightly cramped handwriting, and began to read, picking up sheet after sheet and holding it to the lamp. He was very soon absorbed by the narrative. The room was filled with mellow lamp-light, the mouse rustled behind the hangings, and people walked past the windows, talking; but Posnanski had been transported to Fosses wood, among the shattered trees in a ravine, where two abandoned guns raised their long barrels in lamentation to the sky, and in a throng of labourers in field-grey he saw young Kroysing's handsome face, his high arched forehead, and his steady eyes. The work could hardly be represented as a story, it contained no constructed characters, no plot, and no denouement. The reader was brought up here and there by certain crudities of diction, due to the haste with which Bertin had had to write, or bold expressions where milder ones would have actually been more effective. But it did conjure up the figure of a man, as he had lived and impressed the writer's mind; it set forth the event, as it had happened, mitigating nothing; it called up the sudden shock of that hero friend's death. The French had killed him, but theirs was not the guilt. No: behind the paltry little A.S.C. captains loomed the gigantic shape of what held and wielded power—of all those whose task it was to plan and accomplish the suicide of Europe; poor cretinous fools, who looked on their neighbours as mere objects of attack, and conceived, as the final trump in the struggle for world markets: the Gun.

A notably convincing effect was produced by Bertin's omission to invent any names. The hero was simply called Christoph, and other names were indicated by an initial; at the foot of the fourth page there was a note by the author; "Think of some names." But essential as it was for artistic effect to invent self-subsistent characters, and divest real events of their accidental aspects and reveal their inner essence, in this first draft the cursory treatment of names and events spoke all the more directly to the solitary reader. Posnanski groaned in mental agony, as he read on and knew that what he read was good; this unprepossessing gentleman, Bertin, must on no account be let slip. He was of the same calibre as young Kroysing, and himself, Posnanski; men who labour to deliver the world and by the only effective means; justice, reason, and free discussion. Absurd as it might seem, whoever used that latter instrument, inevitably stirred the fury of the evil principle and its slaves, the men of force; awakened their savage energy and brutality. . . . And while Posnanski buttoned his jacket round his corpulent person, for the March night was cold and he was tired, he found himself to his astonishment, marching angrily towards the fire at the end of the room, which was still glowing faintly, because it seemed to embody the enemy, the eternal foe of the creative impulse, the adversary, the personified force of resistance and obstruction: Satan. He saw him in visible shape, with claws and beak and bat-like wings, with dragon's tail, and treacherous basilisk eyes, his face in a malignant grin. This savage and devouring element, allied with iron, had given birth to every science, cast every gun, and its almighty laughter pealed in the burst of every shell. It had killed young Kroysing, and wounded his elder brother. As a dud shell, it threatened Bertin, in the form of an airman's bomb it had destroyed Judge-Advocate Mertens, it was waiting for him, Posnanski, for Winfried, and the old Junker Lychow—for every man and every woman. Man had failed to tame the fire from

heaven; and reason too, the light of heaven, and justice, Sinai-born, seemed beyond his clumsy grasp. In that night hour, before he went to bed, Posnanski was disposed to give the human race as a whole a mark of "three minus."

In that case, Bertin became the more indispensable. Fire had consumed young Kroysing, and this was the fate of myriads. It was sheeplike logic to dash more frantically into the conflagration, and take no heed of individuals, because there was no purpose in so doing then. But Posnanski knew that there was a purpose, which was indeed to the fore at every moment; and that was—not to wait until the fires were out, but quickly to detach the creative principle from the forces of destruction. In the Kroysing case there was at present nothing to be done, so Posnanski carefully laid the scribbled sheets in the maroon-coloured folder containing the Montmédy papers.

But the Bertin case would have to be fought. The first half of the night had been well employed, and the second half would be still better employed, for in sleep a man's mind is much keener and more active than in his waking hours. And as Posnanski opened the window, to spare Madame Jovin the worst of what she had to suffer, he reminded himself that there were all sorts of methods of rescuing a man, straightforward and circuitous, honest and less honest, serious and light-hearted. All were permitted. Only one sort was utterly forbidden; ineffective methods, that would only bring him into deeper peril. His own good sense and his recollection of his last interview with Lieutenant Winfried suggested to Posnanski that in this juncture he had not to look to Lychow, but rather to the A.D.C. (wherein he was wrong); but he could make the utmost use of Eberhard Kroysing, who would at once realize how obviously the furtherance of his plans against Herr Niggl stood or fell by Bertin's evidence. Sitting on the edge of his bed in his pants and groaning at the effort to reach his garters, with flushed face and set lips, Posnanski made up his mind; the main point now was to settle the Bertin affair.



Then as he lay in his pyjamas under the soft and spotless coverlet, he observed with annoyance that he had left the light burning in his sitting-room. Fire had thwarted him again, he reflected with sour self-mockery, got out of bed, put on his slippers, went out and switched off the light. As he glanced at the window he noticed that the moon, now sinking to the west, seemed unusually bright.

Then, in sleep and dream, there appeared against a marvellous landscape the face of Christoph Kroysing which he had never seen. Embowered in the luxuriant southern foliage it emerged, like the face of a man thrusting through a primeval forest, which the sleeper appeared to inhabit—Posnanski, oddly rejuvenated, and earnestly engaged in arranging and regulating the traffic of an ant-heap and trying, with the help of the white termites to reach the ideal spectacle presented outside his windows by the round *Platz* and the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Very large and starlike, as though seen from the angle of an ant's vision, the young sergeant's face hung among suspended pointed agave leaves and the shafts of the thin, lancelike bayonet grass; and the palm fronds seemed to be clutching at his cap. Beneath its red ribbon and leather peak, the steady dark brown eyes rested on Posnanski, busy at his task, and the mouth, under the broad forehead and curved brows, smiled. "I was unfortunately detained, my friend, as you see," his voice seemed to come from very far above, and Posnanski, a plump youth, crouching in his sand, retorted; "I hope you've got a letter of excuse. You brown-eyed fellows are always away, and leaving the whole job to us. It's just the trick a sixth-form boy would play." "You poor fish, you are sadly changed," said the young sergeant; "don't you see that I can't get any leave?"

And Posnanski recognized the fire burning in the plants; iron and oxygen combined had set their green cells ablaze. "A hundred years of purgatory are quickly over," said Posnanski encouragingly. And the prisoner in the plants agreed: "War years count double." "Mean-

time I shall regard myself as your representative, my dear colleague," said Posnanski into a telephone, that hung from a green silk cord; and from far above his head, now transformed into a sort of moon, but still connected by a long and twisted line of thread with Posnanski's table-lamp, the prisoner replied into the telephone: "*Placet.*"



## CHAPTER VIII: THE CRY FOR HELP

IT was fortunate for Private Bertin that the post orderly of No. 1 Company always did not arrive from Etraye-Ost until the early hours of the afternoon. Otherwise he would have come to a sorry end that day. In Bertin's soul there was not much more space left for disillusion, but his scant remaining resolution and presence of mind were wrecked by Diehl's typed copy of the memorandum. He grasped almost at once what had happened. This was the end. He had come in for a bit of the wildest good luck, a court-martial office had applied for his transfer—but, such was his fatal destiny, the natural course of events was diverted, an A.S.C. major refused his consent, and proposed a totally ineffective substitute. This was beyond endurance, and he found himself wishing he might die. It was a final blow. There was only one thing to be done; he must go at once to Kroysing, to Sister Kläre, to people who knew him and wished him well, and realized that he was not created to be a navvy and break his back under weights that nearly burst a bloodvessel in his brain. He hastily washed, got leave off from Sergeant Barkopp, and ran rather than walked up the familiar hillside path that grew muddier every day, but fortunately froze over again at night. Blind to the shimmering magic of the early spring evening, he trotted on, feverishly composing a long letter to his wife Lenore—as though she were in a position to help him. To the rhythm of his footsteps his sore heart unburdened itself and evolved a strange conglomeration of self-pity and appeals for help, based on a pitiable overestimate of the influence which his father-in-law could use on his daughter's behalf.

Thus he soothed his shattered feelings, while he exchanged salutations and opinions on the weather with the hospital porter. And although his cry for help sprang from a certain ineradicable childishness in his nature, it was a sort of fantasy that did him good. He was then able to describe the affair to Eberhard Kroysing and his two room-mates with that casual self-mockery that was needed to maintain and, if possible, advance him in the young officers' esteem.

In the meantime, a common bedroom and a common fate had gradually initiated Lieutenants Mettner and Flachsbaumer into the affair that formed a bond between Bertin and Kroysing; and in the endless succession of days and conversations, other experiences of Bertin's, such as the strange result of Lieutenant von Roggstroh's recommendation for a decoration, were freely canvassed. The two young officers roared with laughter at his tale of woe; they had been through it all themselves; each one of them had been robbed by some "skrimshanker" of due credit for a deed of valiancy. They considered that Bertin had behaved with perfect correctness, and told him to be careful to keep quiet and not air his grievances. He could safely leave the counter-thrust to the judge-advocate, whose division would, as a matter of pride, not fail to answer such a challenge.

The whitewashed barrack room with its three metal beds looked more habitable than it had a few days before. A vase had appeared, containing fronds of willow and alder—a sign of the interest that Sister Kläre had lately shown in the lieutenants—all three of them. She carefully suppressed a slight impulse to distinguish one of them, whose finer nature so continually flashed forth through a rough, defiant manner. An undercurrent of half-humorous jealousy had crept into their relations: sometimes they were the best of friends, and sometimes barely on speaking terms, but the new light that had come into their lives, accompanied by their rivalry for the good graces of a lady, inspired them with a wholesome zest. Sister Kläre, who was a woman of the world, to all appearances accepted

all three young men with equal nonchalance, listened to stories from their lives and often sat with them while she sewed.

Since the advent of fine weather, the windows did not need to be kept so assiduously shut, and the patients could smoke to their hearts' content; at the same time, with the advent of spring those shattered men, with hurts as yet half healed, grew quickly tired. And so before supper, from five to six o'clock, an hour's rest in bed was decreed, without distinction, for all rooms and wards; no talking, smoking, or reading—all were under orders to sleep. Soldiers, after months of overstrain, sleep like children—with enjoyment and at any time. Bertin sat on a stool feeling rather ill at ease. What was he to do in the meantime, as Pahl would also have to sleep? The Lieutenants, already enveloped in bedclothes, told him to cheer up, Sister Kläre would soon be back. She had spoken sternly to them and promised to come back and see whether they were obeying orders. Perhaps she would let Bertin pass the interval in her room writing his letter (which he could compose in rather more considered fashion than had been possible as he walked up the hill).

Sister Kläre, with her light step, came in; many of the sisters walked like jackbooted dragoons. She really did look like a nun, thought Bertin, as she stopped for a moment in the doorway, surprised, yet pleased, to find him there; she blushed faintly. "This is very nice," she said; "but you must go now." Bertin stood up obediently and made his request; and as he spoke he gazed into those deep blue eyes. "I know a better scheme than that," said she. "Come along with me. I'll be back in an hour, my young friends." Bertin was told to bring his overcoat and cap. Then he followed Sister Kläre through the angular hut corridors as far as a special wing which smelt of warm steam and faintly odd sulphuric acid. Opening a door, they stepped on to a wooden grating, like a bathroom floor. Out of a chair rose a giant, in a hospital orderly's overalls, with his left hand missing and replaced by a hook. "Ah,



Pechler, here is a young friend of mine. Give him a bath fit for a general and smoke out all his bees. He has to be back in Room 19 in an hour." "How you do go on, Sister Kläre!" grinned Herr Pechler; "I've never had a General in this establishment."

Bertin lay in a tub full of hot water, a dark-grey zinc tub in a half-lit cell. Outside he could hear Herr Pechler clattering about his business, and for a wild moment it flashed through his mind that he would offer him a fifty mark note as an expression of his thanks. For nine months he had not tasted the ecstasy of such a bath; a dip or two in a river, and an occasional shower-bath were the only chances he had had of rubbing the old skin off his body. The disappearance of such civilized amenities since the coming of the glorious years only reached the surface of his disciplined mind by a process of inversion; this gorgeous bath was no more than he had accepted as a matter of course every morning of his life during the first winter of the war. His body lay at ease, his limbs relaxed, and his whole self abandoned to a state akin to sleep, and yet more exquisite. And how good it was to have met a woman, on whom he made no demands, and who made none on him, except for a chance to prove her gratitude for a book of which he happened to be the author. Would he ever write again? Would the frost that had eaten into the marrow of his bones ever melt? Would his life in uniform, all his fury at the infernal folly and villainy that had dogged him everywhere, ever take convincing shape in words? His foes had beaten him at last. He, like the rest, had been brought up to stand in the breach for the Fatherland, and there stand fast, and not to evade the common destiny. Now he was tired. He wanted peace; he wanted to turn his back on the heaped abominations that ever threatened to engulf him, escape this malignant persecution of intellect and its possessors, which tried so hard to bring it down and crush it out of life. He cared no more for the good opinion of officers and men of his

own class. He was sick of the soldier's life, he wanted to take refuge in books, and plunge into the play of fantasy; to dissolve this corrupted world into a farce, and mark the movements of events with a smile, that should linger like a soft reflection from the sky over the motley denizens of earth. Yonder, not far distant, lay the forest of the Ardennes, which Shakespeare had peopled with immortal figures, fugitives and exiles, melancholics and lovely maidens, youths and old men, dukes and fiddlers. How he yearned for it all as he lay deliquescent in the bath. Alas, he had forgotten it all—not one single verse, not one scrap of tripping dialogue could he recall. In compensation for that loss, he knew how a man with a weight to carry curves his backbone, stiffens his shoulder muscles, and supports his body on his pelvis; he had learnt all the arts of toil, the use of tools and of his hands, how to bring all his muscles into play, and he had become the comrade and room-mate of those whom society must use as instruments: he had seen all varieties of destruction, he had seen how men can stand up against mud and hunger and the peril of death; murder massed and industrialized, devastation, streams of blood, chill contorted corpses, wounded men shivering beside a fire as the surge of fever shook them, and the hideous slavery from which there could be no relief but death. He knew that all this experience would have to ripen within him, as a good ham is smoked, for year upon year. Would it ever be expressed? Would it not elude his grasp, like bath-water slipping through his fingers? The Kroysing story was bad, he suddenly realized that; it had been stupid of him to show it to Dr. Posnanski. . . .

Well, now he must stand up, soap himself, stand under the shower, and go back, a man refreshed, into the present; he must turn his back on the dreams of past and future, as a man turns his back on too cold a douche, and see what he could do about this latest imbroglio of his, on which alas, his life depended.

## CHAPTER IX: ALL FOR THE BEST

DURING that hour of repose Sister Kläre sat in her room and wrote to her two children, who were better off in a country school than they would have been in a war-wrecked household. She intended also to write to her husband, who was still very near to her heart, though life together had become impossible, now that the slightest opposition drove him to fury. And it was impossible to listen to his abuse of the Kaiser for being so afraid of the Pan-Germans that he had joined with the lunatic Austrians in plunging into a war which he had already lost. Who could remain silent when a once gifted man stormed and thundered that the Germans had brought about the war because they hated the human race, and those guilty of such hatred would pay the penalty unto the third and fourth generation, as the Scriptures said? Perhaps, later on, a doctor might be found who would lift the burden from his spirit and draw the poison from his soul; and then Klara Schwersenz would gladly take him by the hand again, make another home, bring the children back, rebuild a life together, and forget that awful nightmare. Until then everything must stay as it was; he, buried in the Hinterstein Valley, she busy in the service of the Fatherland. She, Klara Schwersenz, a daughter of the distinguished Pidderit family from the Rhineland, and now merely Sister Kläre, did not pose as a martyr; in the welter of war she had rediscovered her youth, she felt freer and more vigorous, she loved her work, though she never forgot she was a woman, and that life came but once and passed. Now she was writing in her clear pointed script to her children; later on she would do some ironing in the lieutenant's room.

There came a cautious knock at the door. An orderly



reported confidentially that a Herr Judge-Advocate Kostanski, or some such name, wanted to speak to Sister Kläre. She raised her eyebrows and then shrugged her shoulders; and said she would see him. Posnanski's massive form soon filled the outer portion of the room.

Sister Kläre sat on the bed, pointing to the wooden chair. She supposed he would be departing for the front at any moment now? Posnanski blew out his shaven cheeks, goggled at her with his frog-like eyes, and thought she looked perfectly charming, and ought always to wear that nun's costume. Then he opened the object of his visit, speaking in a matter-of-fact sort of tone, but choosing his words with care. They were both, he said, people who knew the world and did not want to waste time in pretty speeches and talking round the point. He had heard, through Lieutenant Kroysing, of a shocking abuse of justice, of which Kroysing's younger brother had been the victim. In connexion with this, he had become interested in Private Bertin, and had taken active steps to give effect to his opinion that the man had been working as a navvy long enough, and that the time had come to make sure that a few men of talent should survive the war. He had incidentally observed that Sister Kläre, too, was not indifferent to Bertin the author. "Far from it," she agreed with a smile. "I am just having him soaked in a bath, the poor lousy fellow." "So much the better," replied Posnanski; "then you may perhaps have heard what happened to my application that this excellent young man should be transferred for duty with our court martial?" "Not a word," said Sister Kläre. And Posnanski observed that in that case he had better do the thing thoroughly and begin at the Trojan War; and he gave a pleasantly humorous account of the tacit friction between the army groups to the west and east of the Meuse, explained that this was the background behind the rejection of his application by Bertin's battalion, and that the case seemed hopeless.

If the division had not been about to entrain, if

Excellencz Lychow's mind had not been wholly absorbed in visions of the eastern front, the Western Group Command would doubtless have carried the point. For justice was on his side; it was most improper that a request, on such exalted authority, for the transfer of a man for office duty, should be refused, when he was unfit for active service and fit men were constantly released; after a due interchange of observations, Bertin of the Landsturm would have been transferred to the Lychow Divisional Staff, and given his marching orders. But when the gods were occupied, the dwarfs came off triumphant, and they would do so now unless higher powers interfered. "Higher powers than a divisional general?" said Sister Kläre in amazement; "where are they to be found?" "We know one very near at hand," replied Posnanski.

Sister Kläre blushed, deeply and yet more deeply. "That is a piece of foolish gossip," she said, and got up.

"Dear lady," said Posnanski, remaining seated, "let me ignore that remark for a moment. You have perhaps realized that Herr Bertin has led a rather hard life for rather a long time, and that he is now in a somewhat damaged condition. Let us assume that he carries on for another six months, if he isn't blown to bits meanwhile. Within the next few days we can get him into a sensible sort of job at last. Come, let us be frank; why should our silly prejudices interfere with a perfectly simple and decent arrangement, which is to everybody's interest as well? Of course, I know it's all gossip. Man cannot live without gossip, and the more exalted staff circles present a special section of society, with its own special interests and its own special gossip. But, even in such gossip there is always a trace of truth, and so I assume that the Crown Prince has had the honour of being introduced to you, and taking tea at your house. Now would it be too much to ask you to ring up that exalted personage, not to-day, nor to-morrow, but say, next Sunday, and ask him a favour that would, in our



view, be of the greatest service to the world of intellect at large, and not merely to a personal acquaintance? Wouldn't you do such a thing in Berlin without a second thought?"

Sister Kläre had sat down again. The flush on her cheeks had faded to a rosy glow, she looked meditatively at the toes of her shoes, and her ankles in their coarse grey woollen stockings. "I shouldn't like to meet you in court as counsel for the other side, Herr Doctor," said she, glancing up at him. "Dear lady," replied Posnanski gravely, "God forbid that you ever should. No man can win a case against Saint Genevieve." Sister Kläre shook her head impatiently. "This is silly talk," said she. "I cannot possibly do what you suggest. We are not in Berlin, the Crown Prince is no mere gentleman, and I have ceased to be a lady; I am a hospital sister, the Crown Prince is a general, and an army commander. You must surely see that you are asking me to do something quite outrageous." "Alas, my dear lady, you are at the moment dealing with a civilian, a Prussian civilian, but a civilian all the same. I am quite convinced that the Crown Prince, a human being like ourselves, will be overjoyed if you pluck up your courage and ask him the favour, outrageous as you call it. After all, what are you asking him to do? To tell his adjutant to write just the few words that are needed. Words from on high, as in a fairy-tale." And as Sister Kläre was silent, he suddenly added in an altered, nonchalant sort of tone: "I don't care to assume that after the war society will be shaped to Philistine standards. I incline to the view—don't you agree?—that the novel *Love at Last Sight* is worth a moral effort."

For a moment silence fell between them, hospital sister and lawyer, each set in their own opinion. Sister Kläre looked calmly at her opponent's ugly face, and he with equal calm at her lovely one. And she realized that this frog-like personage knew her prejudices and understood the ways of men. In his eyes it was no shame to admit what one had dared to do. Still, it was unpleasant

for a sensitive woman to observe the part she played in common talk, and that her private life, which concerned no one, provided others with entertainment. If she agreed to telephone to the Crown Prince, she confirmed the gossip of her entourage, and betrayed her secret to this unknown lawyer. Common caution, tact, her own womanly feelings, and usages of society, demanded that she should do nothing of the kind. No one who counted for anything would think the worse of her for her friendship with so agreeable and highly placed a personage, a prince and an emperor's son, who thrilled every German's heart when at Bonn, her native city, he carried the standard of Borussia through the streets. Every woman who heard of that affair envied Kläre Schwersenz, formerly Klara Piddert, or gaped at her in awe. But she must not confess it, she must preserve a smooth forehead and the family honour. And now this lawyer in uniform demanded this of her, this and nothing else. There he sat, girdled with yellow leather, and on his face, his broad plump face, a Socratic look that said: Why so much fuss when you are so lovely? What is the sense of putting up this cardboard façade between the two of us? Why pretend to be more foolish than life itself? Surely it was a great experience? And if it was not that, it was at least pleasant enough while it lasted—in the uncertainty of the morrow that now afflicted the whole world, surely we should all be thankful for any little trifle of happiness that came our way. Sister Kläre noticed that she was smiling, a bold and faintly mocking smile, at her own misgivings; then she gave Posnanski her hand, and said: "Thank you very much, Dr. Posnanski. I will think it over. But now I must rescue our young friend from his bath."

But when Sister Kläre reached bath-orderly Pechler's room, the bird, as he expressed it, had already flown. Bertin had hurried off to see Pahl. He reproached himself for having so sadly neglected his old friend. He must really put aside his own troubles and attend to Pahl for

once, though the prospect of having to justify his eagerness to get transferred to the court-martial office made him feel very uncomfortable.

So two privates of the A.S.C. met at Pahl's bedside, both at the moment perhaps somewhat burdened in mind, though physically much soothed; for one had come out of the bathtub like a man new-born, while the other had just emerged from the kitchen, which was a good place likewise. They both agreed that Wilhelm was changed beyond recognition. He sat up for half an hour at a time, he was putting on weight, he knew himself to be improving at last. "You look surprised," he said with a grin. "Yes, I'm pulling round at last. I can face up to it better now. The worst is the change of bandages in the morning," and he frowned; "just to lie there and know that you're going to be flayed alive and there's no help for it—that's what fairly rips the heart out of a man." Karl Lebede found himself wanting to stroke his hands. Bertin was wondering painfully how he should answer this poor fellow if he began to talk enthusiastically about their coming collaboration in Berlin. The carbon copy sent him by Diehl crackled in his pocket. Perhaps there might prove some way of giving a humorous turn to the whole affair, in which, through Major Jansch's benevolence, Pahl too was involved. "Well, now I can talk as I please again," he smiled. "My bed is my castle, and we can have a bit of a yarn." Since the process of changing bandages, he continued, he knew what prisoners felt like in the Middle Ages when they were waiting to be tortured next day; and those too who were awaiting execution. What a torment it was simply to keep quiet and let oneself be handled like a baby in long-clothes; and then the agony, the assault on the very centre-point of being. There was no need of the actual execution, the hanging, or the decapitation, or the shooting, to degrade the death penalty among all human ideas; it was sufficient to be transformed into a passive object, within the compass of the human body.



The abolition of the death penalty was a plain duty for people who used electricity for lighting, and printer's ink for spreading the truth. Was there any news from Russia, by the way? There was nothing Pahl missed so much in hospital as discussions on that tremendous event.

No, Bertin and Lebede knew no more than was generally known. They were amazed at the force and consistency with which the situation had developed in Russia. All admitted that they had not believed the Russians capable of so much energy. Bertin, especially, who as a schoolboy had made two excursions into Russia with his class, and had taken the Russian course at School—Bertin said more than once that he would not have expected it, in view of that nation's notorious capacity for passive endurance and almost pious loyalty to the Tsar. It seemed in old days that the sun did not rise and set for the sake of the Little Father, and now, lo and behold it continued to do its duty without the aid of the Imperial double eagles, and to shine on Little Mother Russia. "One day every beer-glass will be full." "So will ours," retorted Wilhelm with emphasis, and eyed Bertin. But Bertin would not follow him on to this ground; fortunately he remembered an incident which he had witnessed while working with Russian prisoners at the time of Romagne. One of them was sitting by the fire during the midday interval, a fish-toothed fellow with a large fair beard, distributing hunches of bread among his comrades, not from any goodness of heart, but for cash; ten pfennigs a piece, a very pretty price. A younger Russky with his cap on the back of his head and his fair hair all over his forehead, handed out his coin, received his slice, balanced it on his hand, opened his mouth as though to take a bite, but said quietly, "When we get home, you bloody *kulak*, we'll kill you, don't you make any mistake." And then he began to eat. Bertin watched the seller of bread go a shade paler under his dirty brown skin, and his little light eyes were fixed on the other's as he answered: "If it be God's will,

Grigori, I'll have you shot dead first." But the younger man, chewing with his mouth full, merely laughed and shook his head; "Did you hear, lads? Watch out for the *kulaki*." This evoked laughter and murmurs came from the little group, but many of them plainly did not want to offend the usurer, who calmly went on selling his wares, examined the coins, and slipped them into his pocket. He merely threw a brief glance at the sentry's bayonet. This did not escape Grigori's notice as he munched. "No," he laughed, as he wiped his hands on his coat; "there won't be any Cossack to protect you against us then." "If God wills," replied the bearded man patiently; he looked hungry in the midst of plenty, and was plainly displaying great self-restraint in selling his bread instead of eating it himself. This incident, which took place in positively Russian cold, in central France, had impressed itself on Bertin's mind for its primitive oddity; but since the outbreak of the revolution it had acquired a deeper meaning.

"If it has got hold of the peasants, it will succeed and it will last," he said reflectively. "In France in 1789 it began with the peasants. They crawled about the fields in those days like beasts looking for food—tattered creatures, who hardly looked like men; their lord had sold the harvest to live in luxury in Paris. In Russia it might go far, but in Germany," added Bertin doubtfully, "where everything is so well organized?" "Germany's in a state of organized famine," said Pahl. And Karl Lebede, his fat fingers folded across his person, observed cautiously: "My dear man, haven't you ever read about the so-called 'grubbing trips' that are so popular just now? Why, my old woman writes to me all sorts of stories about the Berliners trooping through Brandenburg with their rucksacks of a Saturday evening, like elderly Wanderbirds as you might call them, and how they curse when some fool of a gendarme comes and suggests they should show him what they've got inside. But I don't mind telling you that there aren't many gendarmes that take the stuff away

from them. If the war lasts another year——” “Another year!” shouted Bertin and Pahl in unison. “Listen,” said Bertin, overcome by the appalling prospect of an endless war, and filled with feelings of good-fellowship for the companions of his destiny, “for the last few days I’ve been in a state of distraction, and I want your advice. You’re pretty well in it too, Wilhelm”; and he related the course of events, as he knew or guessed it, from his first conversation with Posnanski up to that moment.

Silently Pahl held the sheet in his shaky hands. Lebede, his red-haired head bent over the pillow, read it too. Bertin awaited their comment as a prisoner awaits his sentence. Then Pahl tore the paper into long strips. “This is going to work out very well, my boy, but not quite as our masters think. It was only yesterday I had a long talk with Karl about the whole business. I was still half-crazed when we discussed the thing first. I had forgotten all my agent in Germany wrote only last January. And now you drop like an angel from heaven and put us all straight.” Bertin, uncomprehending, looked from one to the other of these two hardened agitators, and listened to Lebede’s account of all the preliminaries that had to be gone through before a man could be got out of service in the field and transferred to Germany. But this court-martial dodge was an excellent way out. “Yes,” said Pahl, and shook his head. “Unfortunately the Herr Major has to be shifted first. I’ll soon be buzzing off to Germany, without my toe, and you, my lad, had better get what help you can, wherever you can get it. We’ll soon freeze you out of a court-martial office.” Bertin was aware of a sudden sense of relief, and shame at his initial caution. He wanted to be candid with those who trusted him, and he needed their support; now he was ready for the fray, and armed against all the vicissitudes to come. So he only laughed when a sister came up to Pahl’s bed and asked rather curtly which of them was called Bertin; he had long ago been wanted in Room 19.



The two who were left looked at his back and his thinning hair. "We did him an injustice that time at Romagne, Karl." But Karl Lebede observed imperturbably that it was better to do than to suffer injustice, and Comrade Bertin had noticed nothing.

Judge-Advocate Posnanski took his leave from Eberhard Kroysing with cordiality and almost paternal warmth. The two other men in the room greatly enjoyed the large man's talk, though some of it rather nonplussed them. Lieutenant Kroysing was not to be convinced that his purpose of presenting the sappers with a recruit, in the shape of Bertin, was not misconceived. Posnanski merely pointed out the importance of Bertin as a witness, the sole witness in the great case yet to be brought against Niggel, Inspector of Taxes from Weilheim.

Kroysing himself could not deny the force of these contentions. He growled in reply: "You want to turn me into a common intriguer like everybody else in this war." The "you" was intended to refer to Lieutenants Flachsbaumer's and Mettner's support of the judge-advocate's scheme. "The man is fit to command a company, and you want to persuade me that he ought to be put into a glass case." "Why, the court-martial office is just the very job for him," exclaimed Lieutenant Flachsbaumer. And Lieutenant Mettner inquired dryly whether the man himself had been invited to choose. And Lieutenant Kroysing said loftily, though he laughed as he spoke: "Choose! Well, really, that's about the limit." Upon which Lieutenant Flachsbaumer called him a tyrant and Lieutenant Mettner a slave-driver; indeed, the latter had often been infuriated by Kroysing's arbitrary ways. And by way of annoying him, he told a story about quite a commonplace and not particularly relevant incident which had happened to him a few weeks before he had been wounded; it tended to illustrate the moral cowardice that was of the worst and most provincial German characteristics. As a liaison officer with Group West, he had had

to pass on the complaint of an officer who had poured out his heart to him upon the occasion of a visit of inspection to one of the neighbouring sectors; it was impossible to get the higher powers to understand that in the front line each of his companies was barely forty rifles strong, and not a hundred and twenty and more, as was always reported. "And then they're surprised when we get a knock. I need not add that the sick, and men transferred for other duty are always reckoned in the line strength." Mettner promised to look into the matter. But when a brass hat from the Lychow group came along soon afterwards to make an inquiry, the man ate every word he had uttered, from fear of making himself unpopular with his regiment, and Lieutenant Mettner had to extricate himself as best he could. "And yet his companies were down to about forty rifles when the French suddenly attacked. And you want to put our unsuspecting friend among a crew like that? Well, you're a nice sort of chap, I must say," Kroysing started up in indignation, but controlled himself; he had, he said gloomily, always put the common cause above personal interests, which, he assumed, was the duty of a soldier. "But in this case," said Posnanski gently, "the circumstances, as you can see, are too strong; so let me have Bertin, or rather, help me to get him, for . . ." But three protesting voices declared that they were sick of that bird of ill omen. "So much the better," twinkled Posnanski. "In that case, you will do what you can for the poor chap; he can't do much for himself." Sister Kläre had expressed herself as willing to help by telephoning to a very exalted person. "So keep her up to it; don't worry her, but be firm. Don't rush her—but in twelve hours or so, eh? She just promised me she would think it over. And you don't look to me as though you would let her go until she was eating out of your hand."

Kroysing, rather flushed, said he would do what he could, just at the moment when Bertin entered the room, eager to hear his fate from Posnanski. They roared



with laughter at his lugubrious appearance and told him to buck up. Kroysing rapped out in a formal military tone that B. had better be transferred to the court martial as having shown insufficient keenness in his present job. Posnanski assured him that effective steps had been taken, to that end. And when the judge-advocate finally departed, he left behind him an atmosphere of good humour and a much comforted Bertin. He shook hands warmly with Bertin, said that he was counting on him, and was only going on ahead to spend some leave in Berlin. "Well, have a good time," said Kroysing; "and give my love to our little town." "I will," said Posnanski; "but to which of them?" "The one between the Technical High School and the Wittenberger Platz," replied Kroysing, "where you can see all the pretty little girls with their pretty little legs." "The Tauenzienstrasse, then, and the Kurfürstendamm," said Posnanski, making a note on the palm of his hand. "Stop!" cried Bertin; "and what about the papers?" "You will make an excellent clerk, Herr Bertin," said Posnanski, with grave approval; "I will leave them in my deputy's charge." And with that he finally took his departure; Bertin went with him to the car.

When he returned, Kroysing asked him casually whether the frog had said anything of importance. No, replied Bertin innocently; he had only given him a little information about the members of the staff with whom he would be brought most frequently into contact. At this, Kroysing seemed relieved. None of the four who were in the know had so much as hinted to Bertin who it was that Posnanski meant by his deputy. He, indeed, took the view that frankness was always the most effective method. But the three officers, who had been much touched by the disclosure, were silent from a sort of *esprit de corps*. They belonged to the hospital, so did Sister Kläre, Bertin did not; the identity of the person who had promised to telephone was a hospital secret, which did not concern outsiders. Above all they liked the idea of this complicity,

however trifling. The affair between her and the Crown Prince had been common talk; now it was a reality which each of those three young men begrudged their general.

In their eyes Sister Kläre no longer figured as a nurse. Here was a lovely lady, who was, in some sort, their friend. For in a long war, in however manly a fashion the soldier may behave, he falls in all important functions to the level of a child. He no longer eats with knife and fork, but spoons his stew into his mouth. He no longer goes to stool alone, but sits on a public latrine like a child in a nursery. He brings his will into complete subjection, and obeys blindly and without discussion as a child obeys its elders. His impulses of love and hatred, liking and aversion, are directed towards his superior officers, who take the place of father and mother, and his comrades, who represent the younger members of his family. In that wholly childish existence, in which destruction plays as great a part as it does in the nursery, the relation between man and woman is matter only for the imagination. Moreover the soldier and the child are spared the struggle for daily bread, they know nothing for the need to earn and produce, nothing of the toil and the rewards that seem so intimately involved with the adult state. And so the impulses of Eros are much livelier in peace than in war, for peace creates what war destroys; and in war, moreover, they are easily diverted towards the same sex, thus completing the analogy with childhood. But after the shock and torment of the first weeks in hospital, there comes a rebirth, a sort of maturity such as succeeds the puberty tortures among savages, and young men, surveying the world with eyes reopened, discover that there are women in it; and then comes trouble. But Bertin, to whom these rites of rebirth were denied, was unwittingly patronized by them, as a nine-year-old is patronized by his elders of fifteen, and treated as a being of a lower order, harmless and insignificant, not entitled to share the secrets of grown-up people.

## CHAPTER X: AN ENEMY OF HUMANITY

SISTER KLÄRE was on her way to Room 19 to do some ironing there as she had promised; who was it that carried her ironing board, with a smile of satisfaction upon his face, a white bandage for a collar, but with coat-tails flying and a violet ribbon at his throat? Father Lochner, the divisional chaplain from the further bank. "Herr Lieutenant," he exclaimed, in broader Rhenish than ever, "right glad I am to see your face again!" And as he laid the long white board carefully against the wall, he grasped Kroysing's right hand in both his hands, and shook it until Kroysing felt quite embarrassed. He threw a brief greeting to Bertin, introduced himself to the two other patients, sat down on one of the beds, and, slightly out of breath, watched Sister Kläre adjust her board between the table and the window-sill; while Bertin, kneeling on the table, carefully screwed the iron's plug into the electric-light socket. For one moment the room lay in darkness; then he heard a voice whisper at his ear: "I won't let you down." And when the light flashed on again, Sister Kläre was quietly laying out her pile of linen. It was very nice of the sister, thought Bertin, as he sat on a stool in the corner and listened to the conversation between Kroysing and Father Lochner—it was really very nice of Sister Kläre to cheer him up and offer him her help.

But she obviously overestimated her capabilities, to use a favourite phrase of Kroysing's. Posnanski had promised to leave the matter in the hands of a deputy, who would indeed be needed, and would have to be a bigger noise than any that this kind-hearted sister might be able to produce. Probably the judge-advocate had referred to



his divisional commander, or someone who had enough influence with Group East to put Herr Jansch in his proper place. In any case it was nice to be sitting there, clean and free from lice, dozing from time to time, and enjoying the moments as they passed. For that night he would again be devoured by lice. His own lousy mattress, or Lebede's, or that of the sleeper below him, would make very sure of that. Lice were unavoidable as fate, a man could not escape them as long as he was encompassed by the massed quarters and massed misery of war. Anyway, he must not forget that Sister Kläre had asked him to write a few kind words in her copy of *Love at Last Sight*.

Yes, Father Lochner had come to the hospital to be treated for a carbuncle, an ugly purplish swelling on his neck. He had at last summoned up courage to have it cut, and for a little while now he would have to depend upon the charity of doctors. Well, even the godless slaves of the lancet served God's purposes by doing what they did. Kroysing felt almost annoyed by the priest's genial presence. He was an intrusive element in that guarded hour. It was distressing enough to have to share the sight of Sister Kläre with his comrades, and watch them eying her graceful movements at the ironing board, and all her comings and goings as she went about her duties. Her secret was out; she was a woman, whom a man might look at boldly and desire.

Father Lochner appeared overjoyed at seeing Lieutenant Kroysing safe and sound after all the horrors of Douaumont. "Sound!" cried Kroysing indignantly, pointing to his heavily bandaged leg. That was nothing, insisted Father Lochner, nothing at all compared with the awful risks he had escaped. "Thank you," said Kroysing, "it's quite enough for me." But Father Lochner was not to be daunted; what of the thousands and tens of thousands who had laid down their lives for their Fatherland? He should be thankful he was alive; he would now see his

home again, and go back to his profession, in one of the factories working for the war. . . . "Certainly," said Kroysing with a nod. "I am going back to my profession, and as soon as I possibly can. My profession is soldiering, and I'm transferring to the air force." "Oh," observed Father Lochner in astonishment; that was greatly to his credit. But surely he had done enough, and might now fairly think of himself and his future. "Pah!" retorted Kroysing, while the others listened intently. He was not talking of his duty, he went on, he was talking of his own satisfaction. The priest knew quite well what a heathen he was—a faithful disciple in the religion of slaughter. He had no mind to hobble about the earth, he preferred to soar into the clouds and scatter avenging lightnings on his enemies' heads. Father Lochner looked distressed; he had hoped to find Kroysing in a milder mood after all these visitations. And that private feud of his—could that be mentioned openly? . . . "That Niggel business? You can speak freely here; we in this room have either suffered from the brute, or know the sort of brute he is. No, my dear Father Lochner, I'll get the fellow yet. And if he is soon to become a major——" "He is one already," interjected the priest. "Then his blood be upon his own head."

A pause followed, and Sister Kläre left the iron for a moment on its tripod. All eyed this wild avenger, who flaunted his vendetta, and trampled on the tenets of a creed which substituted law and public justice for the caprice of the individual. Then the sheets began to steam under the iron. Father Lochner folded his hands resignedly and observed that the issue must be left to Providence, and he trusted it would prove to Lieutenant Kroysing's best advantage. It was merely to be hoped that when the time came he would meet his end as calmly as that little sergeant or corporal from Douaumont, who three days ago in Chaumont hospital . . .

Kroysing, who had lain down, slowly sat up in bed: "Do you mean to tell me Süssmann's dead?"

Father Lochner nodded; "Yes, that was the name."

"Impossible," groaned Kroysing hoarsely, clearing his throat; "he went off to a training course in Brandenburg." But the priest was sure there was no mistake; he must have been sent back to the front in the meantime, training courses had latterly been often held not far behind the lines. Bertin had unconsciously slipped past Sister Kläre, and now stood at the head of Kroysing's bed, leaning towards the priest. "Süssmann," was all he said; "our little Süssmann."

According to Father Lochner's account it had been an accident at a bombing practice for recruits. One of them, an elderly man, was fumbling with his grenade, and Süssmann stepped out of cover to show him how to handle it, the man having assured him that he had not taken out the pin. But as Süssmann came up, the man dropped the bomb and ran. It exploded at once; and half of it hit Süssmann, while the unhappy recruit, a farm labourer from Mecklenburg, stopped the other half. The man was killed on the spot, Süssmann died the evening he was admitted to hospital. Dr. Baer, the Jewish chaplain, had been with him at the end. Between two injections of morphia he talked a little and dictated a few messages, among them one for Lieutenant Kroysing: "Tell my parents that it was worth while; and tell Lieutenant Kroysing that it wasn't; it was a bloody fraud from beginning to end." He had wandered a little in his death agony, but a good soldier had gone to his rest, whose memory would certainly be preserved by a grateful fatherland. Kroysing turned to Bertin; "Our little Süssmann," he repeated with a groan. "Twice he escaped that hell at Douaumont, only to be done in by an oaf from Mecklenburg. And he was so sure—so very sure—that death had passed him, once and for all, and that he had a prospect of surviving the Wandering Jew. No, I'll hear no more of it to-day."

He turned his face to the wall. Bertin stared at him, with pendent arms. No one was safe, and the wrong ones



were always taken. Every moment of every day a man was killed, and forgotten. Yes, the Pelican, in that stuffy billet of his, was right when he said that Germany would become a sink for refuse if this sort of thing went on.

And with darkened eyes he looked round that pleasant room in which the smell of cigarette smoke blended with that of ironed linen. Every soul within it reached out into the future: he was trying to get to the court-martial office of the Lychow Division, Kroysing to the air force, Lieutenant Mettner back to his mathematical studies, Lieutenant Flachsbaumer, if possible, to civil life, where there was a post urgently awaiting him in his father's factory. Sister Kläre and the priest knew exactly what they meant to do, and Pahl, next door, hoped to organize strikes in Germany. Inveterate schemers! "Nothing is final while it lasts," had been the closing words of his novel. Existence was always uncertain; any moment a tile might drop on a man's head, or an electric cable snap and kill him. In Upper Silesia the flywheel at a pumping station had suddenly broken loose from its moorings, hurtled a vast distance through the air, crashed through the roof of a parsonage, and flattened out the parson at his dinner. But war systematized such disasters, and hideously multiplied them tenfold behind the lines, and in the trenches many hundredfold. Not death, but the escape from death, was now the exceptional event. . . .

A knock came at the door. "Are you coming?" asked Karl Lebede.

## CHAPTER XI: SPRING

A FEW mornings later Sister Kläre opened the black felt-covered shutters of her little cell with a thrill of expectation in her heart; to-morrow would be March 21, the first day of spring. In her warm sleeping suit of pink-and-blue striped flannel, she stretched out her arms, folded her hands behind her thick fair plaits of hair, and leaned out to look at the great silvery star poised in the green radiance of the dawn—Venus. She could see far out across the countryside, the golden streaks above the horizon, the misty river valley, and on the left the woods of Consenvoye. Surely the beeches were already faintly veiled in green, and she did not hear a faint metallic rattle, borne on the breeze from beyond the heights. If only the coming year fulfilled its promise! To-day was Thursday; Father Lochner would come to have his carbuncle treated for the last time. If she were going to speak to him at all, it must be to-day. A week ago he had told her that Kroysing was an extraordinary man; he had broken to him his friend Süssmann's sudden death in that abrupt fashion in order to give him a shock, to confront him with the limitations of humanity, and force him to reflect. But it had done very little good, alas, and that stony heart would have to suffer much before it learned to bow to the inscrutable, and understand the sorrows and the splendour of created life. Yes, Kroysing was no common type; nor, again, was Father Lochner, who had led an active life, intellectually as well as physically, and she enjoyed his vigorous arguments with those militants, Kroysing and Pahl. Father Lochner found Pahl still more intriguing than Kroysing, though Sister Kläre did not;



she found Kroysing much more interesting than Pahl, or Mettner, and even than the commandant of the hospital, though he was addicted to vast and gloomy speculations on the future of humanity; even than Bertin, who had been, alas, so sadly degraded by the war; and even than Father Lochner himself. Between her and Kroysing, the enemy of God, there had been no open utterance, nor even a hint; an occasional glance, or quick flush of constraint, had served them instead of speech. Was marriage possible with such a man? On that point she reserved her opinion until she had heard the priest's views. But how—oh how, was he to get her present marriage dissolved, or at least annulled, on the ground of her husband's mania? Poor conscientious Peter Schwersenz, crushed by the burden of his experiences, which he bore in dumb conviction of his own innocence. There he sat in the Hinterstein Valley, like a hermit in his cell, poring over maps and documents and cuttings from French, English, and Swiss newspapers, frantically fighting the Marne battle over and over again, trying to discover what ought to have happened, and what, through his agency, though not his fault, had really happened. Well, she understood little or nothing of all that, and she had always been very ready to regard her husband as her intellectual superior. But she, Klara Schwersenz, had borne two children, got rid of another before it was born, and evaded the bearing of a great many more. And yet, as she now realized, had never fulfilled her true feminine destiny. The last decade of her womanhood had begun; she did not want a man of intellect, or culture, nor a man who did not know his own value, but a man—full of the strain and fire of living, one who walked hand and hand with danger, and could, if need be, laugh in the face of death. She was not so callow as to maintain she could not live without Kroysing, but she knew that, with him, she would be twice the woman that she was. And to him, as an engineer, the connexion with a daughter of the Pidderit family would offer chances

such as he had not so much dreamed of hitherto. The staff of the Pidderit Works would, of course, be very much more amenable to the defender of Douaumont, than to her brothers or the directors. After this war, with its tremendous sacrifices, the workers would of course make demands upon the state that could not be withstood; and only one who knew them well, and could appeal to them as soldiers, could hold their allegiance. Her father, the great old Blasius Pidderit, who loved her as much as he ever loved a human being, after his visit to Great Headquarters and the Crown Prince (with whom she was still on terms of intimate friendship), had talked contemptuously of the fools who tried to curry favour with the Junkers, by refusing what the workers demanded: equal, secret, and direct franchise in Prussia. The old man would get on well with Eberhard Kroysing. She could see his tall form in her family circle, and hear his deep, compelling voice; and shaking her head, half laughing and half in disapproval, she fastened her little window, went over to her washstand, and to-day, for the first time, regretted that her mirror was so tiny; and hurriedly prepared herself for a long day's work.

To Eberhard Kroysing the change of bandages brought no more terrors. For him the day began with breakfast, a meal that grew more tedious every morning; but it had to be endured. In his imagination he replaced the washy coffee, the barely buttered bread, and the porridge with the delights that would grace his breakfast table when the war was won and over, and he had got a decent job. It was not quite clear whether Sister Kläre, if she were by then his wife, would know how to adapt the modest earnings of an engineer to his rather lavish tastes. No matter; at breakfast in the Kroysing household there must and should be an apple, a Kalville apple, yellow, crisp, and fragrant; two boiled eggs, fresh butter, toast or white rolls, and coffee—such coffee as was credited to the Austrians, though they did not know what coffee was,

compared with the breakfast coffee of Eberhard Kroysing's dreams: small, round, delicate pearl-like beans, freshly roasted and ground, and not brought into contact with any metal vessel; boiling water slowly poured over them, left to steep for three minutes, and the master's cup would brim with a steaming drink whose fragrance would pervade the whole house; nor did he forget the indispensable adjuncts, cream and powdered sugar. Minced raw meat, suitably salted, and mixed with shredded onion, slightly thickened with goose fat, and sprinkled with pepper, spread on a soft white buttered roll, or a slice of the ivory-hued cheese of Switzerland or the Allgau, the dark yellow cheese of Holland, red English cheese, squat Brie, or melting Camembert. When a man lay in bed, crippled no longer, and soon to take to himself wings, it was very pleasant to speculate in solitude about cheeses, and view the world with hatred and contempt. It was in the dim dawn of history that men learned the proper uses of milk—the men of the steppes, horsemen with their horse milk, and the herdsman races with their milk of cows and goats, of sheep and asses. It was odd to think that these discoveries in diet had been at once impounded by the warrior people, the Semites and Hellenes, Greeks and Mongols. Robbers and raiders all, and Eberhard Kroysing's heart went out to them, as he stretched out his long limbs and twiddled his toes. For some time past it had been his turn to kill and capture, and now by the age-long privilege of the chieftain he would seize the best woman for himself—the loveliest and the sweetest of the whole tribe. Not simply by force, the times had not progressed so far as that; it was only by forethought and persuasion, by the power of the will and the use of every sort of guile, by the ardour of a suitor, that the woman would be won. And he would win her. His only serious competitor—that sneaking fellow Mettner—had been dismissed from the contest. He was departing that very day to an orthopædic hospital, to be fitted with



an artificial arm, according to the statement in his papers. The shock-headed mathematician had perhaps realized that Kläre's feelings for him were only those of friendship and sympathy, and that was not enough for Mettner, no doubt. Well, he'd soon find a girl to suit him, and no stern, unbending rival to put his nose out of joint.

Lieutenant Mettner was, in fact, dressed and watching the orderly strap up his baggage and carry it out. "I should be glad to hear from you, Kroysing," he said. "I think it's a pity you're not going back to civil life too. You're a talented fellow, and in other times—in peacetime, I mean, you should have become one of those engineers of the outposts who do battle with wild rivers and waterfalls—creative warriors, or warlike creators, just as you like. But now . . ." "I'm going to be an airman," said Kroysing shortly. "However, I'm quite in with you as to our division of labour: you work for peace and I for war; you prepare the future and I safeguard the present." Mettner shook his head: "I'm afraid, my dear Kroysing, that you won't find flying at all in your line." "Good God, man!" exclaimed Kroysing; "I shall begin to feel I'm something like a man at last when I'm sitting behind a machine-gun, or dropping bombs down on to the pates of my enemies below. Then our little friend Franz will have to keep his eyes skinned." And he pointed to an aeroplane, crossing the window like a black insect, high up against the clear blue spring sky.

Jean Francois Rouard, the painter, had gone up that night to bomb the ammunition train and the hutments at Vilosnes-Ost, and then, bearing to the right, to blow up the railway track near Damvillers. He had received his orders half an hour before; that night there would be bright moonlight, but next day or the day after, the weather would turn to rain. He knew the distances, but he was keeping a careful check of his times. The Germans would try to retake Bezonvaux, which was sadly needed to secure

their position. They had brought up two Baden regiments—men with numbers 83 and 47 on the collars had been captured—crack regiments, whose sudden appearance was significant. Well, they would soon find their entrenchments a trifle too hot to hold them. Jean Francois Rouard was a resolute young man, and did not care whether he dropped bombs on beds, or women, or railway stations. Pipe in mouth, arrayed in leather jacket and trousers, he listened intently to the thudding of his sturdy engine, made signs to his pilot, and noted down his times.

Meantime Lieutenant Mettner had taken his leave of Kroysing; he was to catch his train at Sedan or Montmédy about midday, and so had little time to linger. His parting from Sister Kläre would take place in No. 3 Men's Ward; it would be brief and cordial and quite informal, and Flachsbaumer and Kroysing would have the room to themselves. With philosophic calm Eberhard Kroysing eyed Mettner's empty bed, which he would now be able to use as a table for his maps. Today had been a good day; he had disposed of a rival, and spring had come. The window could be left open; in the words of the song: "Now come the soft blue breezes"; by the Lord, he would get out his flute and in the gladness of his heart give a rousing rendering of that air of Mendelssohn. And on that day too he would induce a certain lady to make up her mind; and in token that she was breaking with her past, and prepared to yoke her destiny with that of Eberhard Kroysing, she would definitely telephone to an exalted, highly placed personage, who, at the best, was no more than a rather callow youth, and would probably appear and pester her that very afternoon. But he must not be allowed to come again: that affair was over.

The men of the Barkopp working party viewed the arrival of the spring with mixed feelings. Half France was sticking to their legs, as Karl Lebede observed. Great clods of earth clung to the soles of their boots as they tramped

across country. As a result of the thaw a cache of shells and crates of ammunition, which the gunners must have used as a platform for their guns, had come to light in one of the ravines. It was a ghastly job to dig them out of the mud and convey them to the nearest field railway; however, Sergeant Barkopp had promised them the next day off, as every available truck would be needed for this new discovery. In line with three French trucks, stacked with gigantic paper parcels of unknown content, by that night eight trucks stood ready for removal. That day the working party had indeed justified its name; those five men delved into the clay, laid bare the shells, and then carefully detached the loose earth between them with picks; the caps were still on the fuses, and the steel cylinders were as harmless as babies' bottles; but they were icy cold and slippery, and very difficult to shift. But men who, during the great cold, had warmed their fingers against their own skins, thought little of handling that chilly slime.

"I suppose you know we're for sentry duty tonight?" said Lebede to his neighbour Bertin. "It's all one to me. Who's the third?" "Old Stuttgarter," answered Lebede. "They're making a fuss about the cases of explosive. He told me he's applying for Number 1, so he can get to bed before midnight." Bertin laughed at the scorn in Lebede's voice. "That's all right," he answered; "then I'll take Number 2." "So there'll be nothing left for me but Number 3," grinned Lebede; "and I shall be the first to greet the spring. . . . Ah well, I've seen some forty springs. In that case I shan't go up to see Wilhelm tonight, I shall take a sniff round the new field kitchen of the Oldenburgers, they're going up to the line tomorrow. What about you?" "I must look in on the old chap," said Bertin, trying to lift the hinder part of a shell. "Well," said Lebede, "then I daresay I'll come along too. We may not see much more of old Wilhelm. He's going to be sent to Berlin soon, the old joker. I'll be mortal glad when we've got him out of the place." "Would you



exchange with him?" asked Bertin curiously. And Karl Lebede, as he grasped the other end of the shell and raised it without effort, said: "I can't answer that straight off. I might say yes, or I might say no, according as I might feel at the moment. If Barkopp had just got across me, and I was fed up with the Hamburg swine, I should very likely feel inclined to break my truss, and follow Wilhelm. But if I'd just got outside a bowl of stew, I should reckon that I could get all the blessings of hospital life cheaper than he did, and stay put. I often feel anxious when I think of the old boy. Suppose there were a fire in those huts—he'd be as helpless as a baby." And he shook his red head in misgiving. "All right, you take Number 3; and now we'd better be toddling."

Sentries in the Prussian army do two spells of two hours on duty, with four hours' interval for sleep. As Number 1 begins at eight in the evening, Number 2 covers ten till twelve and four till six. If French airmen came over, they appeared about eleven, sometimes a quarter of an hour before, sometimes a quarter of an hour later.

## CHAPTER XII: POST

PRIVATE PAHL was really acquiring confidence and the will to live. True it was that the hospital, just as he expected, had all the characteristics of the class state: on the one side, doctors, officers, sisters; on the other side, the patients of the rank and file, and between them the orderlies, who were gradually discovering, though much too slowly, to which side they belonged—namely to his poor patients, his panel patients temporarily in uniform. However, life was none too bad; there was not much bullying, the food was good and plentiful, the tone of the place was cheerful, though hearty, a trifle too Christian for Pahl's taste. Still, better Christian than Prussian. He grew better able to face the change of bandages, and ceased to shrink when the wound, that now took the place of his great toe, was washed and freshly plugged. As none but paper bandages were available, and cellulose was used in place of cotton wool, there was no need to envy their neighbours in the officers' ward; each and all were subject to the stricture of the blockade. There were five meals a day, and his food was such as had long since become mythical to the men in the field; milk, from a living cow, white wheaten bread, real sugar, and pork that was actually pork; the day before yesterday one of the hospital pigs had been slain by its faithful keeper, bath-orderly Pechler, who had shot it behind the ear. It was called Anne-Marie, and had been something of a favourite; now she had disappeared into various human stomachs.

But there would be successors among the pigs, as among the rabbits, which were kept so that the patients might, indirectly, get the benefit of the uneaten food. Pahl liked pork,



and rabbit too, and the sisters and the orderlies were delighted to notice that he began to make jokes, and his hard-eyed ugly face was often lit with boyish laughter. Pahl had also conversed with Bertin's three friends—the first time he had come into such contact with officers since he had been called up. They had been to see him; a certain Sister Kläre had interested herself and others in Private Bertin's friend, and Pahl's marked personality had impressed them all. What made him so engaging was his habit of speaking out his mind quite frankly and quite sedately and with that wonderful new smile of his—the smile of a man reborn. Kroysing was a queer card. Pahl knew what had happened to the younger Kroysing; he had been deliberately put in a post of danger because he had stood out for his men's rights. The engineer, his brother, was a clever fellow who knew his way about; how was he going to deal with the matter? Would he rise above the merely personal element? Could he see through the social forces of which he was the servant? Indeed he could not; a strong, upstanding man, who ought to have known better, was content to persecute a wretched Bavarian tax official and a few of his subordinates; it never so much as occurred to him to ask whether Captain Niggel was not simply obeying an order when he so mercilessly nailed down young Kroysing in Chambrette farm—an unwritten order of society to dispose of strikebreakers, terrify any possible blacklegs, and always prefer the interest of the state to what is called humanity.

It was with very inquisitive eyes that Pahl, his wound now healing at last, though very slowly—long strips of toe-skin had been dexterously laid over the gash of the operation—awaited the visit of the tall lieutenant, and made such an impression that Kroysing came over every day to have a crack with him, as he called it. Pahl's reputation as a man of intelligence was much more widespread in the hospital than in Pahl's own company. In hospitals men have a great deal of time to spare, and few

distractions, and their conversation tends to be expressive of what they think, whereas busy men's talk exists rather to conceal their thoughts and further their own aims.

Kroysing was, at the moment, more of a patient than an engineer, and he wagged his head thoughtfully over the questions addressed to him by the little compositor in a polite half-mocking tone—and very intriguing questions they were. How, for instance, did Kroysing, as an engineer, view the fact that any invention he might make while in the service of any given concern, did not belong to him personally, nor to the community, but to the concern? Did he think that reasonable? Kroysing, seated on Private Pahl's bed, did not. He was of the opinion that all engineers in the whole world, and certainly all those in an individual country, should combine to share the profits of their inventions. Kroysing, however, was under no real illusions; engineers were a savagely competitive race, and hardly likely to submit to any sort of collaboration. The engineer and his employers must be convinced of the mutual indispensability. It was safe to rely on the enlightened self-interest of such captains of industry.

These were good talks, the inmates of Ward 3 opened their mouths and noses as they listened to the crooked little compositor's lively arguments and rejoinders, and the tall lieutenant's obvious glee as he dealt a telling counter-stroke. Driven into a corner, the lieutenant finally declared that he didn't give a damn for any co-operation, and that if a man couldn't swim by himself, he must just be left to sink. He personally was not the sort that ever came off second best, and that was the main point. The true man was he who walked alone, according to the old proverb: help yourself and God will help you, or if not God, the fire brigade. Whereupon Pahl pointed out that a fire brigade had to be on the spot, and that implied an organized community and mutual aid in the struggle for existence.

Neither would budge, and it was clear that by logic and facts Pahl was in the right, in Kroysing's case, the man

himself was his own argument, as he snapped in all directions like a sheepdog, and flung his own personality into the dispute as the best evidence he could offer. In the end they laughingly agreed to continue their discussion after the war, Pahl at the head of vengeful slave hordes, Kroysing as a satrap of predatory capitalists—to use the language that would be employed by the journalists on either side. Then it would be seen who was in the right, or, in other words, the stronger; and who possessed the deeper vision and was better qualified to restore the wreckage of human life. That, Kroysing maintained, was a task for soldiers; Pahl was sure that the soldiers would have been long since inwardly transformed into proletarians in uniforms. And so they would part good friends, and both, though they did not show it, still with much to think about. Pahl's reflections, as he tossed from side to side, gazing out at the delicate blue distance through the window, seized, as always, on the essential point; how could he reawaken in this hard-headed young man and his like, their youthful sense of obligation to their own abilities? How could they be taught to see beyond their own education; their creed as willing worshippers of private property—private property in all those raw materials and natural forces that armed and arbitrary power had torn from their original possessor, the community? Pahl saw on the horizon a vision of starving humanity waiting to be freed, and his brain reeled—for he was still very weak—before the task that awaited him at home. Life at the lowest level; cramped housing, bad food, defective education, and hopeless toil, and the incessant grinding envy of the comforts of the middle class—all this paralysed or perverted whatever ideas or gifts or individuality lay latent in the vast army of the exploited. Bertin had once explained that Christianity had conquered because it had awakened the self-consciousness of women, slaves, prisoners, and children, and released their capacity for action to the great enrichment of the community. Herein, as in many other



matters, Christianity was the forerunner of socialism. Would he live to see the time when, twenty years after this orgy of destruction, one or two liberated nations had been able to reveal the gigantic constructive forces that had long waited for an outlet?

As Kroysing came back into the room, Sister Kläre was just clearing up; Lieutenant Flachsbaumer had been taken down to the massage room to do a few simple exercises, and would certainly be away for half an hour. The motor of Kroysing's will was crackling and sparking at high tension. He sat on the bed, and watched Kläre sluicing the floor with an odorous solution of lysol. "Well, Kläre," he said abruptly, "what are we going to do?" Frau Schwersenz's demure eyes glanced up at him in alarm: how could she have betrayed her feelings? "What can I do for you, sir?" she asked in mock humility. He eyed her gloomily. "None of that nonsense," he said; "let's have the whole thing out on the mat. If I were a foreman and you were a workgirl, we could have come to terms long ago. Our position is more complicated, because we're educated people." A flush of fear swept over Sister Kläre; "Go along to bed now, lieutenant, rest your leg, and don't be silly." And as she spoke she was ashamed of her pitiful evasion. Kroysing lay down obediently, and looked across at her with steady eyes. "Kläre," he said; "you know what I mean. This room contained three men who loved you. One has gone; he was the nicest of us, but the weakest; and old Flachsbaumer will dream of you all his life, because he didn't get you, and he'll enjoy that very much. But I am the man who is going to marry you." Sister Kläre shook an admonitory finger: "Is that a threat, young man?"

But Kroysing shook his head: "I'm stating facts. I'm mad about you, Kläre—absolutely and utterly mad. When I think of having you with me day and night for the next twenty years, I could jump over the moon. You know that, you aren't a hypocrite, you're a woman, and your heart's in the right place. I don't get romantic and make

a song about you, I don't stroke your leg and put my hand on your breast——" "Well, I should think not, Herr Lieutenant!" "But I can't sleep at nights for thinking how I'm going to feed and lodge a wife. So long as the war goes on I have to move around just where G.H.Q. sends me; at the moment I'm a plain lieutenant of sappers, but in a few months I'll be the famous airman, Kroysing, or a heap of ashes." Sister Kläre looked at him wide-eyed, shut her eyes, took two steps towards the bed, opened them again, realized that she had a damp duster in her hands, wrapped it round the mop, and carefully swabbed the floor up to the end. Meantime he continued, and she felt his eyes on every movement that she made. "When the war is over, and if we both get through it all right—if you don't die of disease and I don't break my neck or my nose; when we get home again, and Germany is celebrating her victory all around us, what can I offer you then? That crooked little chap Pahl over yonder is no fool; and, as he says, what prospects are there for an engineer? As a boy I always dreamt of being a captain in the merchant marine, I thought it would be wonderful to stand on the bridge, and to command a great white liner. It never occurred to me, of course, that the captain doesn't own a single rivet on that ship. I now know that the captain is a rather poorly paid transport engineer, and such he will remain, even though his wife can travel free and first class round the world. But what have I really to offer you except myself? A nice little four-roomed flat in Nürnberg or Augsburg, a couple of charming old folks as parents-in-law, and with any luck a car, if the works will allow me one."

Sister Kläre suddenly dropped into the haughty manner that, after fifteen years of marriage, she had only recovered at the war. "Really?" she said innocently. "But that would be essential. Without a car—no, Herr Lieutenant, without a car I could never be happy."

Kroysing fell into the trap: "That's just it," he said

gloomily; "I've no idea what your home has been like. I understand you come of a rich family and your husband was a staff officer. Well, we can't live up to that, Kläre."

In after days, Sister Kläre often remembered how she thrilled with joy and tenderness, in that morning hour of the twentieth of March, at this young man's calm, collected wooing, which he seemed to regard as dispassionately as the healing of the bone in his leg. "I'm glad you haven't forgotten my husband, Lieutenant Kroysing." "There is such a thing as divorce," he replied shortly. "There are such people as Catholics," she replied in the same tone. Kroysing sat up in bed and glared at her; "Kläre," he said hoarsely; "you aren't going to tell me that there's nothing doing between us just because you've been married for a couple of years." "My dear man," said Sister Kläre, "a couple of years! Fifteen years!" And inspired by that sum-total she counter-attacked. "A wife can't leave her husband just because she's found a younger man that needs her. She has a wife behind her that cannot be ignored. We aren't just fly-by-nights, free to hop in and out of young gentlemen's beds as we please. No, my young friend, there's a great deal to think of, and all sorts of people who are entitled to an opinion, and all manner of their objections. And if I am to take your proposal seriously——" "Kläre," he exclaimed, standing on one leg, supporting himself on the bed with one hand, and reaching out the other towards her. Sadly but with a happy smile she backed slowly to the door. "I must consider it," she said in a low clear voice. "I'm sick of this consideration," he cried, almost wrathfully. "First she'll consider whether she'll do a little telephoning to help a friend of mine, then whether she'll marry me and whether she feels inclined for a divorce. Well, my diffident young lady, I'm for action, sharp and prompt. If you're prepared to marry me, ring up the Crown Prince before twelve o'clock tonight. If you aren't, you need only tell me this evening that you aren't going



to ring up until tomorrow. Understand?" She nodded, and was just about to speak when Kroysing abruptly skipped across the room on his undamaged leg, flung his long arms round her, pressed his lips against her half-open mouth, felt her body yield for a moment and then stiffen, released her and said: "What I have, I hold"; and hopped like a long-shanked hay horse back to bed.

She picked up her bucket and mop and walked silently out of the room exactly like a housemaid who has just been kissed. Kroysing felt his heart hammering against his ribs. She'll telephone, he thought triumphantly, she'll telephone this evening, and her name will be Frau Kroysing, as sure as mine is Herr Kroysing. Immediately afterwards it occurred to him that she would discuss the case with Father Lochner. He must get on the right side of the priest. For the moment, Niggel had become a person of no importance. He laughed inwardly; he would, reluctantly, sacrifice his vendetta against Niggel, if Sister Kläre married him, and Father Lochner helped her to get her present marriage dissolved.

The morning activities of a large hospital take up all the time of those whose duty it is to alleviate human suffering, and to set maimed or mutilated soldiers on their legs again. Whether his proceeding is regarded, as by Pahl, as the renovation of the slaves of toil and battle for the benefit of the ruling class; or, as by Kroysing, the levy of the last reserves of force for service to the nation and the state in Germany's fight for existence, does not alter the underlying reality. The dread ceremony of changing bandages, with its accompanying agony and groans and curses, marches on from room to room. Sisters carry out buckets of festering useless cellulose, to be burnt. Some wounds may call for cauterization, where the healing process has gone astray, and a rank growth of flesh has taken the place of firm, new vital substance. Then the probe or the scraper comes into action, and the victim

must lie steady and endure. Others, more fortunate, resort to the gymnasium, where their damaged limbs are slowly refashioned to the uses for which nature originally intended them. Human material, that inscrutable, sensitized conglomeration of cells, contains in its entelechy, or in the law of its own fulfilment, the irrefragable proof that man is destined to transform the surface of the earth—subject, indeed, to a compelling force like that instinct of butterflies and insects and bees to fertilize plants. It often seems as though the planet were self-inspired with energy, and lives to lavish its raw materials and its vital forces, so as to provide its reasoning denizens with richer life. It drives that compaction of a milliard and a half cells called humanity into a riot of activity and conflict, goading on the higher types, those more generously endowed with intellect and foreknowledge, while rousing the lower, stronger and more untutored elements to resistance, and makes that clash give birth to new discoveries, new energy, and more abundant harvests. Flying, chemistry, the art of healing, and the science of war—all have advanced by leaps and bounds; new means of communications have opened up areas hitherto untrodden, and groups of men, once unsuspecting of each other's existence, have now become familiar. Established social systems have collapsed, and he who cannot summon all forces within his grasp in his struggle for existence, no matter what the privileged may say, is a beaten man. In the days to come, benefits may be rewarded with ingratitude, promises repudiated, and vested rights abolished. Why not? The sense of morality is only feebly developed, and its purpose barely understood. Science is much more intelligible; for it helps humanity to kill.

Engineer and priest came to terms most admirably on this basis; each regarded the other as the champion of a weaker cause. Fortunately they concurred in the vague conviction that the human members of the world household were entrusted with the obligation of protecting the



individual. For, as they observed, nature works only with species, kinds, races, and large groups; all the more does she expect that the race of men shall safeguard the individual as, in its struggle for the enrichment of its abode, humanity clings to the individual constituting the goal of earthly fertility and the struggle for existence. While engineer and priest wrangled amicably, the commandant sat by the side of some of his patients, who had been put in special rooms, experimenting whether treatment with running water would assist the natural healing forces. Water did help; the fluid constitution of man seemed to respond in gratitude. Outside, in the yard, vast companies of hens, with a few cocks in the charge of them, cackled and pecked

fluttered; pigs grunted in a row of sties; and huge long-eared Belgian rabbits, with soft skins and eyes, hopped about. The March light sparkled above them, joy thrilled in their hearts. Alas, they did not suspect what purpose would cut short their fleeting gaiety, a purpose but for which they would never have existed.

In certain rooms, wet linen was being briskly rubbed on corrugated iron sheeting; in others, food was being cooked for several hundred people. A red-haired matron sat bent over a table, inscribing figures in a ledger; a horse-drawn wagon, lurching up the hill, brought tinned provisions and ration bread, and, in a larger sack, the post. Here at once, was work for many hands; it was sorted, given out and read; and from it came much healing influence. Composer Pahl got a letter, which he read with a quizzical smile. His application was already on the way and would doubtless be successful; his unit, the A.S.C. battalion at Küstrin, had emerged from oblivion; he would be ordered home, formally and solemnly discharged, transferred back to civil life, and to his profession, immediately after the calculation of the pensions to be paid to composer Pahl by his grateful country. As a composer does not stand in urgent need of a toe, his disability, and consequently the money payment in respect to his wound, would not

be considerable; none the less, Pahl was now a man with an income, and he could never actually starve. The campaign which, in the words of the soldiers' song, was not an express train, had for him, come to a stop. For the others it rattled cheerfully onwards.

It had been as little influenced by the German Emperor's peace offer as by President Wilson's notes and the prayers of Pope Benedict XV—this war for the redistribution of world markets. The capitalists had not, indeed, begun it, but they had put the aristocratic land-owning class in the three empires in control of so powerful a military apparatus, that once set in motion it would not stop until it had crushed humanity beneath its wheels, and collapsed. The capitalists could not make peace, nor could the feudal states, except at the cost of their own ruin. Only the nations could make peace, when sufficiently impressed by the blessings of a lost war.

Lieutenant Flachsbaumer also got a letter, read it, sighed, and put it under his pillow. So did Lieutenant Kroysing. It was from his mother, to whom his father had long since delegated the task of writing letters. She was longing for his transfer to a Nürnberg hospital; and she hoped that would be soon. She had been having bad dreams, and he must write to her as often as he could. She felt that until she had him in her arms he would not be safe from the murderous claws of war.

Kroysing frowned; that sort of talk should be left to washerwomen. What on earth could happen to him here? The Verdun front had quite lost its importance, and there was no more talk of any long range guns on Franz's side. And as to airmen, there was a red cross on the roof and on the flag. As regarded flying, by the way, he thought he would wait to broach that subject to his parents personally, when he was home on leave. "We are definitely counting on your settling down in Germany, my dear boy, and if possible taking up your profession once more, and somewhere near home. We are both very

sorry to think how little we saw of you just before the war. I daresay it was partly inevitable owing to your work, but dear boy, you must now remember that you are our only son, and you must help us to get something out of life. The parents' house is only a parents' house when it is a children's house as well. And we have already given our Christel. I am not a heroic mother, I confess it frankly, and I often feel like crying my eyes out over your dear clever kind brother, just as I should have cried if you had been taken, and our great tall proud long-legged Hardi had never come dashing up the stairs again. But I don't cry, because it is foolish, and only upsets your father's heart over again, and he cannot help me. If the Fatherland needs further sacrifices, I don't think we are called upon to make them, we have done enough. I often wonder whether I shall ever nurse a grandchild on my knee—that is the true happiness left for an old woman like me."

Yes, thought Kroysing, a grandchild to give her a new lease of life. He must really write to her. During his last philosophical skirmish with Father Lochner, he had taken occasion to offer him Niggel's scalp, provided he stood by him over certain difficulties which Sister Kläre told him about after dinner. It was an honest bargain, and Father Lochner seemed so to regard it.

And he set about writing to his mother then and there. There was an unusually warm and kindly feeling at his heart. He put out of his mind the sense of grievance that had estranged him from his parents, because, in his opinion, they had always preferred Christel, as being quieter and more cheerful. All manner of affectionate expressions came into his mind as he sprawled uncomfortably across the table, and, in his large bold script, wrote the last letter that he was ever to write.



BOOK NINE  
FIRE FROM HEAVEN



## CHAPTER I: A LITTLE ADVICE

FATHER LOCHNER stepped briskly into Sister Kläre's cell, where he had been invited to a cup of coffee before the end of the midday interval. "What is this I hear, Sister Kläre, and not from you, but from the Wild Huntsman himself!" The little room smelt fragrantly of genuine coffee, the only luxury that Sister Kläre did not deny herself and her friends. Quietly she sat on her bed, with an almost stern expression in her eyes as she surveyed the agitated priest. "Never mind from whom you heard it, and if my tall young friend has exaggerated at all, I'm here to answer your questions. Do you approve, or not?"

The chaplain had lowered himself on to a chair, and was stirring his sugar with a tiny spoon, his little finger delicately crooked. "That's what I call taking a bull by the horns. That is Sister Kläre at her best. You might have been abbess of a great convent a thousand years ago, shedding light and comfort over a whole countryside or province." "Now you're talking rubbish, Father Lochner, utter rubbish, just to evade an answer." "Do you like him?" asked the priest cautiously. "Yes," replied Sister Kläre; "I do, I like that tall young man very much indeed. But I also like my husband, and my children; I'm not a silly little girl, nor such a slave to my emotions that I can't tear them out of me if need be. If you think that the practical difficulties are too great, that the injury to my husband and my children is too deep, I'll tell Kroysing this evening that it can't be managed, and that we must find some other form of friendship, or part."

Father Lochner raised his eyebrows, secretly shocked at the matter-of-fact way in which a lady of the



highest rank, in the dress of an army nurse, and looking like a particularly lovely nun, faced such a situation. "Do you think," he asked tentatively, "that Colonel Schwersenz will ever get better? Do you think you will ever really live with him again, and really come to mean something to him?" "No, I don't," said Sister Kläre. "My mother writes to me from Hinterstein that he never leaves his maps and papers, he's completely bemused by his part in the battle of the Marne, and indifferent to everything else whatever; he only takes the vaguest interest in what may be going on, seldom asks after his children, whom he always calls his grandchildren, though he is perfectly fit and eats well; he takes long walks—route-marches, he calls them—thinking of nothing all the time but strategy and tactics. The old lady, who is the most sensible person I know, says she is rapidly becoming a military expert; and she is just waiting for the moment when he will insist on enlightening the Emperor and the Reichstag, and perhaps even make a public pronouncement on the battle of the Marne, which will of course mean that he will have to be sent to an asylum." "Dreadful," said Father Lochner; "what a noble mind is here o'erthrown." "That's Hamlet, isn't it? It is only too true. But if I can ever really get into touch with him again . . ."

"Then a Christian marriage is no longer possible," observed the priest, emptying his cup. A silence fell. Sister Kläre wondered whether she should say any more. Then she went on: "I am not given to self-pity. Neither do I care much about other people's opinions. But I should like to say that the present state of affairs is only the last stage of a process that began years ago, and always looked like ending this way. My husband lived in his profession like a scholar or monk. He was a soldier, body and soul, otherwise, as a man of the middle class, he would never have entered such a profession. But he felt himself superior to everyone, including myself. Before the war, I thought it quite normal, especially as I noticed

the same sort of thing in my father and my brothers. But now I think so no longer."

"I quite understand that," observed the priest, as he watched the steaming coffee, and savoured his second cup, "the war has revealed to you humanity in every guise, exposed the kingdom of this world in all its fulness and its misery, and the work of redemption in which you have to take part. You can no longer lie fallow. But what, Sister Kläre, do you imagine will be the effect of a fresh marriage on your children?"

Sister Kläre took off her coif and smoothed her hair with thin, strong hands. "I am quite sure," she said; "that a young and energetic stepfather like Kroysing could only have a good effect on them—so far as can be humanly predicted. But in children there are passing impulses, and incalculable forces, that may put a different face on everything; growing children are individuals, impenetrable up to a certain point, and quite independent, I know that quite well." "We are not expected to take the attitude of an insurance company," said Father Lochner, wiping his bald skull with a handkerchief; "your good intentions and honest convictions are quite enough." "I can be sure of those, God knows," said Sister Kläre. "Then in my opinion your marriage with Colonel Schwersenz could be declared invalid, if you wish, and I will support you, so far as in me lies." "Yes," said she, "I do wish it"; and she put on her cap again. "Good gracious," he exclaimed, looking at his watch; "you must go back to your work. And I must say good-bye to my poor penitents, Catholics or not. I shall begin in Ward 1, and I shall try to finish up in Ward 3. I must find time for Pahl. And after dinner, the chief has invited me to a bottle of wine, as a reward for my abstemiousness during my cure. Such is my modest programme." Sister Kläre was tying on her apron: "Well, I daresay we shall meet now and again." And as her fingers were busy behind her back, she added, with a casual air: "You know Kroysing is a



Protestant?" "Oh," said Father Lochner, raising his hands in deprecation to the level of the table; "this case is better taken on its own merits. Once your marriage is dissolved or declared invalid, a fresh page begins, with which we are not called upon to deal. I will indeed confess," he added with a guilty smile, "that it is not without misgiving that I offer you my help. Kroysing made me a promise, which he will tell you of himself, to behave like a Christian, instead of a bloodthirsty heathen; to pardon an enemy, or at least to let him go, and thus avoid an appalling case at law which would set all Bavaria in an uproar, and gravely embarrass our Church. Wherefore, Sister Kläre, I shall thank the Holy Virgin that many things have here combined to produce the best result, and no one need suffer for your happiness."

"And I think that is all we poor mortals can expect, Father," said Sister Kläre.

## CHAPTER II: THE MAN

LATE in the afternoon Bertin appeared in the company of Karl Lebede. By Pahl's bedside a notable company was assembled. Many patients were standing round, sitting on the beds, or leaning against the wall, listening. With a portentous air of one who presides over a discussion, Kroysing lowered himself into a chair, laying himself on Pahl's mattress. He was forcibly reminded of the wild and heated arguments of his student days, which ended in uproarious abuse. But Father Lochner, with his experience of the Ruhr miners, the dockers of Cologne, and the button-moulders of Elberfeld, had no notion of letting him get the game into his hands. As a Rhinelander, he knew how to deal with townsfolk, and with Pahl's baleful and expectant eyes upon him, he had in a few minutes started a conversation that he intended to control. But he did not find it quite so simple after all. When Kroysing arrived, accompanied by the commandant in his white overall, they were disputing the origin and meaning of the Easter festival, in which Pahl saw a symbol of the joy of beasts and men in the return of spring, and the fertility feast of recrudescent life in the guise of the egg; while Father Lochner aimed at basing it historically and materially on the struggle for freedom, as for instance of the Jewish proletarian nation against Egyptian exploitation, under the leadership of a member of the ruling or official class, such as Mirabeau, or, now, Kerenski in Russia.

Here was an exchange of weapons, observed Kroysing, in high amusement; the priest had been too clever, and Pahl, little bright-eyed Pahl would be one too many for him if he wasn't careful. But when Bertin

and Lebede came in, the conversation had taken a more general turn; they were discussing redemption, the sacrificial death on Golgotha, the nature of man and the divine. There was a fervour in the air, observed Lochner; the yearning of all humanity for peace became more intense as the months passed by, since the Kaiser had, as it were, stamped the word peace with the Imperial eagle. The Pope and the Kaiser, Professor Wilson, and the labour leaders of all nations, had concentrated all their efforts to bring peace back into the world, but in vain. Why was this? Who could be resisting the work of redemption? Certainly not the soldiers. They were fed up with it all, and if the bugles sounded "Cease fire!" at noon that very day, at half past twelve, it would be difficult to beat up a German and a Frenchman for a game of skat.

This was greeted with general laughter and applause; the only one who did not laugh was Pahl. He was sitting on his pillow, with his back against the bed-head, and in his slow and candid fashion, spoke his mind. "Unfortunately," he said, "all these peace overtures are subject to certain conditions, which have to be fulfilled by the other side. It's rather like a dog-stealer with the dog he's stolen; the dog is savage and won't do as his new master tells him, and alas, peace has to stay inside her box." "Now no political arguments, please," said the commandant. The wide space between his eyes, the square forehead, and the brushed-up hair gave him a peremptory look that was belied by his husky voice.

"Nonsense, sir," said Kroysing; "you must let your patients talk a little politics if they feel like it, they aren't going to come to blows." "Certainly not," agreed Father Lochner; "I would have you notice, by the way, that I am the only person in this company who is wearing something in the nature of a tunic." "The church militant," interjected Kroysing. "And among these hospital overalls I should find it difficult to raise an army. And yet I am for war; yes, the church militant. But not for the war of



guns and infantry, but for the war against the indefatigable Adversary, who can banish peace from the world, and check the progress of redemption." "I see damned few signs of redemption in the world, when I look about me," said the commandant calmly and without bitterness. "And yet we must believe," said Father Lochner, almost passionately, "that Christ's passion did release us from barbarism and degradation, otherwise we might all give in and put our heads in gas ovens." "So you think," said Kroysing, "that but for that event our prospects would have been much worse—presupposing that that event did actually take place?" "Now no religious arguments, please," observed the commandant, with a quizzical smile. Whether it took place or not, observed Pahl, was relatively unimportant compared with the faith it had inspired. There was no need for any theological dispute, because this faith was a commonly recognized fact, as incontestable for Christians as for Jews and atheists. So the priest could proceed in peace. But really, he remarked with a twinkle of amusement, friend Bertin ought to be heard at this juncture. For since the exodus from Egypt until the trial of Jesus at Nazareth before the Roman military governor of Judea, Jews were behind the whole story.

Bertin laughed. He was proud of the yearning for redemption, of the Messianic impulse toward a nobler world, that had dominated the spiritual history of his race since the days of Nebuchadnezzar. He used to be able to talk at large on the prophets' tirades against the potentates and the multitude, in their effort to instil morality into organized society. But now—well, I'm a feeble sort of fool, he thought, as he set himself to answer Pahl. Yes, he said, what the Greeks expressed in tragedy, man's conflict with fate, was presented in actual life among the Jews, in the conflict of the prophets with the defiant materialism of their own nation. They had not spared that nation, they had even got it a rather bad reputation for obstinacy. But in reality, all nations behaved with

equal obstinacy, only it was not so publicly proclaimed. There must be some force, he said, staring gloomily before him, that fought against redemption. Hence the Devil played so large a part in all cults and in every age, even though it was a fundamental principle of Christianity that he had been deprived of his more dangerous teeth. There was a good deal to be said for the view of the poets, of Goethe, for example, that the power he still possessed was quite sufficient for today and tomorrow.

Pahl and Kroysing protested, and Father Lochner was not satisfied. The first two would not hear of such subterfuges, but Father Lochner again insisted that more account should be taken of the reality of the Devil. "Dear, dear," said Bertin, "I seem to be in a quandary. They won't acknowledge a devil at all, and you, Father, don't think he's real enough. What am I to do?" "Do?" growled Kroysing; "stop talking nonsense; we're rather too old to be scared by bogies." And Pahl said no more, but made a mental note to reprimand Comrade Bertin for producing these picturesque antiquities, which any intelligent worker would regard with ridicule. Then Karl Lebede opened his mouth, which he had never done before in that company. "When the gas man comes," he said, "and wants the January account paid, and it's already March, and there isn't enough money to pay it, then my wife would certainly regard the gas man as the personal devil; there is only the one gas cooker in the house, the state has taken care of that, and if the supply is cut off, she won't know how to manage. As far as my wife is concerned, the Devil has appeared in person. If my wife is a fool, she abuses the gas man as though it were his fault. But she isn't, and I should be sorry to think she was. She'll try to find out where the Devil is really to be found. In the Gas Works? No. In the city of Berlin? No. In the Provincial Administration? Who knows? In the State of Prussia? The English think so at present, and pretend their own gas men are angels. Among the white men? The Indians

and blacks would protest. And so we shall come back to the Father's opinion, that he has got the whole world pretty firmly in his grasp." "Softly, softly," exclaimed Pahl; "haven't you skipped a few stages, Karl?" "No," put in Father Lochner; "our Landsturmer hasn't missed any at all. The bitterness of life, the want of fellowship, the paganism of society, all that is well and truly figures in what is now the living embodiment of the nation, the horned, hoofed, mocking monster; and there is no use being indignant at the fact. The Egyptians wrote in pictures, and the nations are still at the stage of children and poets and Egyptians; they think in pictures. The only fools are those who take the pictures literally, and act as though their antagonists were fools. Yet no one thinks that lightning is really a bit of white-hot wire, though it may look like one." "Yes, and that's one way to redemption," observed Kroysing dryly. Some of the rank and file laughed. They always enjoyed listening to the tall lieutenant. He wasn't to be imposed on by all this pompous talk. "So the Devil is the capitalist system." Father Lochner frowned; that was trivial, he said brusquely. Any other purely material economic system could degenerate in just as devilish a fashion. What they were discussing were the fundamental forces, the message of Easter, and the aim of all religion, if it seeks to preserve the soul of man.

Suddenly Sister Kläre appeared in the little circle of sitting and standing men; radiantly white in her spreading apron and her starched cap. She whispered some figures to the chief, which she read out from her record, a long slip of paper that quivered in her hand. At most of them the other nodded, at some he frowned, at three or four he shook his head as though in irritation. "The Devil is what we doctors call stubborn flesh," he said; "the damned organic life that always baffles us. And redemption, if I may express myself summarily, is, and will always be, death. For so long as the flesh lives it suffers, and all our arts, that aim at deadening pain, are



shown up as a fraud, when all is said and done." At this, all the disputants protested with one voice. Impossible! They almost shouted. Death, gasped Father Lochner, savagely, was the gigantic folly, that sin had brought into the world. Death stamped its clumsy foot on everything; trampled Novalis into his grave, and strangled the gifts and aspirations of humanity when they had barely seen the light. Death brought an end that was no fulfilment; death was like an idiot, who split a violin for firewood and used it to heat the stove. Yes, agreed Kroysing, it was a point of honour with a soldier to say nothing in favour of death. In the trenches, death was the ultimate treachery and desertion; a dead man was a betrayer of his country and his cause; and rightly or wrongly, war was eternal, the passion for conflict was ingrained in man's very nature, and all warrior religions must take account of that emotion. He, in any case, if confronted with the choice, would sooner range the earth as the Wandering German, like the Wandering Jew, and plunge into every conflict and share in every victory. Pahl's pale eyes lit up; that was admirable, when there was an idea behind it, when the issue was the liberation of a vast and creative section of humanity from oppression, exploitation, and injustice. Such was the purpose that should be served by the fighting spirit; the establishment of a new basis from which future generations could make a better start so that every Pahl, Bertin, and Kroysing could be put in his proper place for the service and redemption of humanity. "Redemption—I seem to have heard that word before," said Kroysing.

But Bertin, pale and quivering, said that if anything was the Devil, it was the application of physical force, the act of striking down and silencing the victim. Death was not the evil thing—there was a deep and compelling attraction about death; a natural longing to sleep as one's fathers slept, to feel and think no more, to give no more answers and ask no more questions. But devilish indeed was the process of murder, all the various methods that

humanity had devised for the extinguishment of human life. When, in nature, the individual met his end, like a candle that burns out, all was well, here was no matter for regret. But if the individual, or a whole generation, were robbed of their right to life, as a chair that is wrenched from beneath a man by a stronger hand than his, then he must stand firm, and make common cause with those threatened like himself. Sister Kläre was very shocked, and apprehensive that Bertin might get himself into trouble. "Time for bed!" she cried; "the meeting is adjourned."

The men murmured. They wanted to hear more, this chap was talking sense, everyone had the right to live.

"Those opinions won't make you popular with the Prussians," said Father Lochner, sharply, but eying Bertin with obvious respect. "If you oppose force, young man," said the commandant, "you'll find yourself opposing life itself. I fear you are rather blinded by your indignation. The infliction of suffering is the first act of man. Before birth, during birth, and after birth. By force he makes his way into the world, or, to be more exact, is thrust into it, when his hour has struck. Violence, blood, and agony—thus the young hero makes his entrance. And if these simple fundamental facts have any message for you—how does he reply? What is the first activity with which we greet existence?" "We scream too, I suppose," said Bertin; "we scream in anger, we protest against our fate."

None knew why they awaited the answer so eagerly. The smile on the face of the doctor became inscrutable. "I don't know," he said, in slow and measured words, "whether you will like what I'm going to tell you. You want a confirmation for the doctrine of revolution, and in a sense I am providing you with one. But it is not a pleasant one, and I am sure it is more drastic than you will approve. The newborn baby is slapped to make it cry; blows are its first experience, and indispensable if it is ever to breathe."

A couple of soldiers laughed approvingly. A rustle of excitement among the audience. "And yet," pursued the



chief, "that is not the infant's first overt act. For while it passes the door into the world, it apparently suffers pain, and to express that pain it greets existence with a discharge of excrement. That is its salutation to life. Ah, I knew you would be shocked. Not a very dignified act of revolution, I agree." Four men opened their mouths to answer, and then closed them again. Bertin inwardly flared up in protest, as he remembered all the care and effort that had gone to alleviate the pains of childbirth that science had refused to accept as a provision of nature. But he found himself dumb. The commandant's words had struck a chord that must be left to vibrate uninterrupted. So the group gave way respectfully to let the doctor through. As he went, he looked round once more. "I hope," he remarked, "that what we have been saying will not go beyond the four walls of this room." "It isn't a room," laughed Sister Kläre; "it's a hut." And she walked out after him.

A general dispersal followed. Pahl shook hands with Bertin as they parted. Bertin said he was on sentry duty that night, and so was Lebede, and they would have to hurry. "Get along, my boy," said Pahl, with something like affection; "and come again soon. You've done a good day's work. You and I together, we'll give the baby a good shake-up."

Lebede resolved to warn Bertin on the way home to be more careful, although he had been less surprised than the rest by his friend's outburst. The man was ripe, and he wondered it hadn't happened before. "Wait for me outside," said Bertin. "I'll have to go and say a word or two to my lieutenant, or he'll bite my head off when I come again."

As he, with Kroysing on his arm, walked slowly from his room, he made his excuses; he could not understand why he had broken out like that. Priests used to infuriate him in earlier days, but this was the first time he had done such a thing for a long while. "I'm surprised at you,"

growled Kroysing: "however, you're not quite such a fool as you look." They reached the passage; the door of the lumber room opened, and Sister Kate came out. She said, looking at Bertin: "Now don't you let yourself get out of hand, young man, I'm telephoning to somebody this evening on your account," nodded, and ran down the corridor.

Kroysing stopped, and his fist gripped Bertin's shoulder strangely hard. "That's going to be a redemption," he said, breathing heavily. "Yes, I mean."

### CHAPTER III: THE BREAD OF THE HUNGRY

LEBEDE the innkeeper, in the guise of a private in the Landsturm, his grey oilcloth cap with its brass badge tipped over his forehead, and his hips girt with a leather belt, at precisely one minute before ten o'clock handed to Private Bertin, also of the Landsturm, a long rifle, infantry pattern No. 91, with an improved lock, and said in a non-committal tone: "Here you are, my lad, and I hope you'll enjoy yourself." Both men were wearing their overcoats; Lebede's protruded strangely at the hips. As they walked side by side to the hut where Barkopp's working party was housed, he explained casually why; he had taken occasion to investigate the large parcels in the French trucks. And he had made a very remarkable discovery. "Just taste this!" So saying, he held out something hard and gritty to his companion's lips—Bertin cautiously bit off a small section. It was white bread, a hard, stale roll. He looked in surprise at Lebede, who solemnly nodded. "White bread, my lad. For the French prisoners in Germany, so that they shan't starve. The Red Cross provides it. But the Red Cross doesn't provide for our wives; so we have to make our own arrangements." Lebede tapped his pocket: "I've got a nice little lot here." "But it's as hard as a brick," said Bertin. "My lad," said Lebede pityingly, "soaked in coffee and fried in a pan with a bit of butter and treacle, it'll make grand fritters. And if your wife can get hold of some sultanas and stir them in and bake the stuff in a mould, the Easter hare himself couldn't ask for a better pudding. It's grand wheat flour; you just ask the Empress, and if she's in a good temper and tells you the truth, she'll confess that it's a long time since she's seen the like of it." So saying,



Karl Lebede laid his hand on the door-handle, but turned once more and said curtly to Bertin: "If you hadn't stood up to those fellows just now, I would have kept this to myself; it's a pretty good while since you've put anything into the common pot." Bertin, rather nonplussed, made his way to his beat, between the two sidings of the tiny station at Vilosnes-Ost.

The lower end of the valley towards the river shimmered in the mild radiance of the spring night; on the right was a steep slope, at the crest of which lay Dannevoux hospital, out of sight. The earth stuck to his boots, but the moist air was gratefully fresh compared with the smoke and reek of the huts. Vilosnes-Ost station! There, in the previous spring, Quartermaster-Sergeant Grassnick's A.S.C. company from Serbia had detrained, and marched behind him in a sort of dream past the muzzles of the Bavarian field guns, almost stumbling within range of the French artillery. A year had passed since then, more than a year—and what a year it had been! So must the sixth-form boy Bertin have looked down on his first-form counterpart, the youth who went to dances in moustaches and long trousers, and the callow knickerbockered urchin. But it was not certain that the year was over even now; Sister Kläre had promised to telephone to somebody that evening on his behalf; and Private Bertin was no longer so crude as he had been in the first days of their acquaintance, when, for instance, she was ironing in Kroysing's room. From what had reached his ears, there must be something between this attractive lady and the Crown Prince, which naturally threw quite a new light on the situation. Why not? It was not for anyone to interfere in the private lives of grown-up persons. The Crown Prince was not popular in the army. He evaded hardships that were imposed on many hundred thousands in his name. And that he had to pay for; certain packets of cigarettes were left lying in the mud on the Moirey-Azannes road. But as a gentleman, he could not refuse a favour to a woman with whom he had been on

intimate terms. Sister Kläre's advocacy looked promising—thank God! And if Major Jansch got up on his hind legs, the poisonous little toad, and spat as hard as he knew how—well let him.

There was hope in Bertin's heart as he made his way over switches and sleepers on his prescribed beat between the two trains; on his right, the five closed square goods trucks, full of damp powder, damaged and unexploded shells, and on the left, quite a distance away, the open bread trucks, covered with great tarpaulins. He was still surprised at his outburst in the hospital. He had often cursed, as every soldier does; curses were one aspect of discipline. But never had he broken out like that in the presence of strangers and superior officers, and to such purpose that Pahl had congratulated him, and the commandant had requested that what he had said might not be repeated outside the walls of Ward 3.

What could be the matter with him? He was twenty-eight years of age, but he felt like a hundred. Had he not entered the war full of enthusiasm for Germany's cause, and thrilled indeed that he had been privileged to live in this glorious age, and fearful that he might miss the great experience owing to physical weakness? And now, after barely two years, all his aspirations lay in ashes. He was faced with a bleak, derisive world—a world in which force held sway—blank violence, open and unadorned. It was not the justice of a cause that mattered; the jack-boot closed the issue. This war was a conflict of opposing boots; the German boot against the French boot, the Russian boot against the German, the Austrian against the Russian, the Italian against the Austrian, and the British shoe, sturdier than them all but more elegantly cut, planted a well-placed kick where it was needed. And now the American shoe had made its appearance. The world had gone mad. All the amenities of peace had been crushed; all that remained was a sort of orderly-room existence, and a man might think himself lucky to preserve even that.

Thus pondering, Bertin had reached the bread trucks, covered with their grey and white tarpaulins. He raised the open flap of the centre truck and felt inside. Splendid! Paper parcels, slit up one side and relieved of a certain amount of their contents. Bertin hurriedly filled his overcoat pockets, peering round guiltily as he did so. But only the moon observed him, gleaming from afar through the tenuous swathes of mist in the valley.

Bertin was wearing gloves, so he did not need to put his hands in his pockets—the deep bag-like canvas pockets inside his overcoat. Next day he would send the rolls to Lenore, together with Karl Lebede's extemporized recipes. He did not like the look of things at home, nor did they seem much better anywhere else in Germany. His letters of the last few weeks gave much food for thought, except that there were so little time to think. Well, he had time now, and Bertin soon found his thoughts turning to his young brother-in-law David, the budding musician, who had written letters full of savage disillusion to his parents and his sister from the training camp to which he had recently been drafted. "We're called volunteers," he said, "and we're treated like slaves." Yes, David was a bright lad, and could express himself otherwise than on the diatonic scale and the five ruled lines, which he called Beethoven's telegraph wires. Nor was the news from his brother Fritz any more encouraging; the regiment had again left Rumania, and was now rather mysteriously stationed in the Adige valley, which boded no good for all concerned, including the Italians. The old Emperor Franz Joseph was dead, and his successor Karl had, as the phrase went, left for the Front, but the main task would fall upon the Prussians (who might, of course, be Bavarians, Württembergers, or Hessians): in a word, Frau Lina Bertin was feeling very anxious. Well, she would soon be able to relieve her mind about her eldest at least, though no one could deny that the young one, Fritz, was and always would be, her favourite. Sister Kläre was going to



telephone to a very important personage that evening—perhaps she had already done so—and Frau Bertin could soon set her mind at rest.

Small may be the room and narrow the bed: and yet they have often proved large enough for two; even Lieutenant Kroysing's lanky limbs, though one of them was swathed in a stiff bandage had found lodgment in Sister Kläre's little cell. Across the corridor, Lieutenant Flachsbaumer slept in blissful solitude. "Shall I go and telephone now?" "What on earth for?" A soft feminine laugh; "But I promised you I would telephone this evening." "There's plenty of time. The evening has hardly begun." Again the woman laughed, a soft, alluring laugh. No such sound had ever been heard under that flat roof. A lighted wick floating in a tumbler full of oil threw a faint reflection on the roof; it shone in Sister Kläre's steady eyes, and on Kroysing's forehead and beaked nose. "We must be sensible. You must not forget, sir, that your sweetheart is a housemaid. She has to get up fresh and early in the morning. And I cannot do with less than seven hours' sleep." "Charming housemaid. Can't you ring up after eleven?" "Between ten and eleven. Very well, just before eleven. And then you promise to go along to bed." She sat up and looked sternly at him, her plaits of hair hanging over her shoulders, and her parted lips in a smile: the delicate contour of her shoulder seemed to begin at the lobe of her ear and ripple down the arm. Kroysing slid his long fingers slowly down it. "Kläre," he said; "Kläre—" "What is it, darling?" "I'm so idiotically happy. Bertin doesn't deserve that you should get out of bed and put that pretty foot of yours on the bare floor." She thrust out her foot beyond the bedclothes, and twiddled her toes, so that their shadows flickered on the wall.

How quickly does the time pass on sentry duty? As quickly as the sentry pleases. The panorama of his life,

the movements of the stars, and his own darting, circling thoughts, passed at will across Bertin's inner visions as he tramped to and fro. Strange it was, however, how often a half-realized thought thrust at the thin veil of consciousness until it found a weak spot and broke through. Bertin's parched soul drank in the moonlight, the vast stillness, and the faint, vague sounds wafted from very far away. Somewhere in the distance an iron-tyred lorry was rattling along a road. The activities of the front lines were beyond his hearing, the guns were, indeed almost silent, and the steep ridged hills engulfed the rifle fire. How light it was; each individual sleeper, the siding yonder, a heap of broken shell-baskets, and the flint filling of the track, stood out with unnatural clarity. Ought he to have filled his pockets with this stale and tasteless bread? Had not Lebede committed a deadly crime in stealing what it was his duty to protect? Had not Bertin himself committed the same crime? It was a military offence of the gravest kind—if discovered. And yet the average officer would merely laugh if anyone came along and accused himself or anyone else of such a thing. What was the harm in stealing a bit of food in time of war; war itself was one long process of organized robbery, at home and in the field, prolonged for three years and practised every second of the day and night. A scrap of food?—that was nothing. Soldiers must be provided with what they need, and an army needs a great deal and needs it for a long time; and since an army does not produce, it must clearly steal. If it steals with care and caution, its depredations may continue so for a long time, but if it grows too rapacious, there may be trouble. Sergeant-Major Pfund, for instance, who had suddenly disappeared a few days before, sent back to Metz, with a large black mark on his conduct sheet. The winter of starvation was near its zenith, Major Jansch had been forced to disgorge some of his hoarded stores, and he had sought and found a victim: Herr Pfund, and his astute Christmas purchases, which figured officially as—a process



of embezzlement of canteen funds. The doctor had complained, the park had complained, and these complaints had provoked much acrimonious comment at the headquarters of Group East; moreover, according to the report of Post Orderly Behrend, a pair of broken boots had arrived accompanied by a caustic letter; all of which not unnaturally resulted in the relegation of a sergeant-major to the wilderness. For the last three days or so a new man had been in charge of the company, one Sergeant Duhn, a silent man with steady grey eyes, who kept himself very quiet, but had achieved what remained denied to the more pushing Glinsky; the dirk and badges of the regular army. Bertin absorbed in his meditations, turned, and stepped briskly back to the bread trucks.

There they stood, the tarpaulins loosened at one corner: the sentry who was to guard them could quite conveniently help himself. And that, thought Bertin, was typical of human society. The state, protector of the weak against the strong, comes down decisively on the side of strength, and robs its charges for the benefit of the strong, though within such limits that the hungry shall not go so hungry as to down their tools and organize against their despoilers. Organization is forbidden; the weak must come forward one by one and state their grievances. That very day he had championed the need for organization, and the cause of the weaker side, and now his pockets were stuffed with white bread for his wife, which he had stolen from the weakest of all. Break bread for the hungry, says the Bible; steal the bread of the hungry, is the practice of war; and here he was in the very act of doing so. Could this be true? Private Bertin of the A.S.C. was stealing the food belonging to French prisoners of war, which their wives had sent them, and of which they stood in sore need. And yet, clearly as he realized all this, he made no attempt to restore what he had stolen. His wife, too, was hungry. In the late summer and even in the beginning of October, he had, against his officers' orders, shared his

ration bread with some Russian prisoners, who had been engaged on the more menial labours of the park. He well remembered the gaunt soldier, with his rusty overcoat and rusty skin, shuffling up the path to the third platoon hut, and whining—"Bread, for God's sake; bread!" And his look of ecstasy as he had stuffed the hard black bread into his overcoat pocket! Bertin slung his rifle from his shoulder, crossed his hands behind his back, and staring upon the ground, strolled back and forward on his beat, muttering at intervals in a tone of astonishment and horror; "God help us all . . .!"

Beyond Verdun, a city now half in ruins, at that very instant an airman was making ready to start. Pale in the moonlight, and with a sense of slight constriction at the chest, Jean Francois Rouard, painter, with some mechanics, was testing the struts, the height and direction levers, and the catches for releasing the bombs, which hung, like giant bats, head downwards beneath the belly of the machine. Two on the right, and two on the left. An aeroplane still looked uncomfortably precarious, he thought; and no wonder. It was not eight years since Blériot had flown the channel; and how long was it since Pégoud had electrified the world by his loops and acrobatics? Standing with his hands in his pockets, Rouard shook his head in admiration of his fellow-men, for what had then been so thrilling was now the common stock-in-trade of the fighting airman. Damn the war, it was a filthy business, but so long as the Boche wanted to mess up France, we had to drop the needful on his square and wooden skull. Then he checked the petrol supply. All being well, he hoped to be back in half an hour, and he tapped three times on the trunk of an apple tree near the hangar, whose leafless boughs stood out in delicate network against the sky. From the half shadow of a neighbouring shed appeared Philippe, his friend and pilot, who had been hurriedly relieving a physical need before being

strapped into his seat. He was the son of a Breton fisherman, and approached with a faintly nautical roll, swinging an ivory rosary which he would hang up in front of his seat as a talisman. Rouard nodded to him, Philippe nodded back; sole tribute to a solid companionship that had already faced death from beneath the blazing wreckage of an aeroplane.

Lieutenant Kroysing stretched his long limbs out of the bed of a lady whom he had made his own at last; dressed, kissed both her hands, and limped as softly as he could down the short corridor to his room. It was pitch dark, Lieutenant Flachsbaumer was snoring, and from the men's ward across the passage came a like sound from many throats. Kroysing groped his way along the wall to his bed, put down his crutch, and hopped in practised fashion beneath the sheets. His heart was throbbing with the glory and the joy that had thrilled in his voice alone. He had laid a hand on circumstance and bent it to his will. With this woman for his own, he knew he would start with an advantage over all his fellows. He could now succeed in whatever he attempted: he saw himself as a famous airman, a distinguished engineer, or a captain of industry. This woman who was now busy in her room, and would soon be cautiously opening her door and flitting down the corridor with her pocket torch in her hand to telephone to a personage of whom Kroysing was not in the least jealous, because he was now no more than a memory in her life; this woman, who had doubted him and laughed at him, even when he took her in his arms, would send him soaring upwards into fame and fortune. His heart leapt in a thrill of exultation. He had not held Douaumont because certain fools had prevented him from doing what he could have done; but he would hold this woman, and with her at his side, hold the approaches to the future. Calmer now and master of himself, he closed his eyes, and smiled as he let his head sink back.



He wished he could have stayed awake and heard her returning footsteps. However, he would only doze for a short time. Tomorrow she would again be clearing away bloodstained bandages. No matter; that too was a part of life. And inwardly he hummed a tune, the words: "Joy that flashes down from heaven. . . ."

As Sister Kläre walked down the long corridor of Hut 3, turned the corner, and made her way down the much longer ones of Hut 2 and 1, she wondered whether she had not been very foolish to leave the electric light burning in her room. She had opened the window, to clear the room from the fumes of the oil lamp, in which she found it hard to sleep. She walked on air, she moved in an aura of joy, and she longed to invent some new form of breathing that would absorb it into every corner of her being. If only she were sure that shutter was closed; there would have been enough draught between the edge of shutter and hut wall. It was foolish to be over-careful; Sister Kläre was an old soldier, and she knew that a little carelessness now and then was in the day's work. Still, it would be better and more sensible to go back and switch off that light. Unfortunately—and she laughed silently—people had rather a habit of doing what was least trouble to themselves, instead of what they ought to do. Besides, she was very tired, and she must have all her wits about her for the conversation on the telephone; moreover it would be some time before she could get the connexion; there was no time to waste. Supposing the shutter was, in fact, half open? Just during that quarter of an hour while she was away, someone was sure to pass and notice that Sister Kläre had disobeyed the regulations, and left her light on without covering the window. Was it not Bertin who had some story about a general whom he had seen driving one night with his headlights full on through an ammunition dump? Ah well, thought Sister Kläre, as she went into the telephone room, I'll risk it.

I'm so happy, and I've got such a fine fellow for my husband, that nothing can go wrong, I'm quite sure.

The Dannevoux field hospital telephone exchange was, for obvious reasons, situated in that part of the great block of hutments that lay nearest to the approach from the village. It was served by disabled soldiers whose eyesight had been injured; before the war they would have been called blind. One of them could just distinguish light and darkness: another could see only with a part of his left eye; the third could make out only objects at the edge of his field of vision—what was directly before him he could not see at all. These three almost blind men had been chosen by the commandant from among the patients and trained as telephonists. They were quite content with their occupation and their quarters; all three were cavalymen; a Uhlan from Magdeburg, a cuirassier from Schwendt, and a dragoon from Allenstein. None of them wanted to go back to Germany and try to make a living as a blind man. They had easily mastered the routine of their new employment. Their hearing had grown keener and their memory had improved; and the telephone service in Dannevoux field hospital went without a hitch. Sister Kläre opened the door into the reek of coarse tobacco. Under the dimmed light sat Keller the cuirassier, knitting—for which the sense of touch was more important than light. He recognized her by her voice; and he greeted the late visitor with surprise and pleasure. He had been in the telephone room for some time, and often put through this same call; as usual, he began his activities with the words, "Sit you down, Sister, it'll take a bit of time." Then he began to parley with people far away, people whom he had never seen, but with whom he was on the most familiar terms. Telephonists are a discreet race; and rightly so. In the vaporous reflection from the little lamp Sister Kläre awaited the result of his efforts; with her elbows on the table and her chin resting on her slim wrists, she watched Keller at the switchboard.

Very soon she felt sleepy, took out a cigarette case, and began to smoke. As her glance caught a tiny monogram on the hammered metal, she smiled. The golden toy was appropriate to the moment: she would soon be speaking to its donor.

The German Crown Prince was an excellent host, and that evening he was in high good humour. He had had a Swiss military expert to dinner, and engaged him in a long and technical conversation on the movements of the Fifth Army during the last days of the Battle of the Marne, a talk that would one day bear fruit. A war correspondent and an artist, both working for German newspapers, were also at the small round table, and the Crown Prince's personal adjutant completed the company. There were no women. An orderly entered and whispered something to the adjutant, who then turned to the host, and told him he was wanted on the telephone, speaking with a certain intonation which escaped the guests; that slim young gentleman jumped up, excused himself in a few courteous words, and hurried out of the room. He did not know who could be ringing him up, but it could not be anything vexatious. It might be the Crown Princess, it might be one of his boys; but before he sat down at the writing-table on which the instrument stood, his adjutant had caught him up, said something in a low tone, and vanished. "But this is delightful," were the Prince's first words. This sort of gallantry will touch the head of any woman, and especially that of a German woman, who is not much spoiled in that direction. Sister Kläre promptly asked him in a bantering tone if he knew on whom he was wasting his pretty speeches? He laughed softly, and addressed her with a pet name he had invented for her, apparently oblivious of the fact that they had not met for nine months. Could not Sister Kläre come over for a little while, he had some good friends with him, though there were, alas, as usual no ladies present; the car could



be on the way to Dannevoux in a couple of minutes. Sister Kläre laughed. She was speaking in the presence of the blind telephonist who, however, then took occasion to go out and contemplate the stars. So she was able to speak with greater freedom, and she told the Prince that he was no doubt a very great commander, but the sisters at Dannevoux hospital could not dash about in cars at midnight. She would be delighted to see the Princely car one of these days, provided that it contained His Imperial Highness on his way to pay a formal visit to the hospital. She would like to introduce to him a certain sapper lieutenant, who had done great deeds in the last days of Douaumont. The Crown Prince laughed, and said he was sure so gallant an officer had found a warm place in Sister Kläre's heart. Upon which she laughed too, and murmured something noncommittal; he could not see her blush. Then he asked after Colonel Schwersenz—could he do anything for him?—and learned with regret that there was no change in his condition, and none could be expected so long as the war lasted. Sister Kläre had rung up that evening to ask a favour, not for anyone with whom she was personally concerned, but for a man who was of importance for what he was and might become. And she described to her listener, in the Rhenish accent that slips so softly from a woman's lips, the whole affair of Bertin the author, his major, and the Lychow court-martial office, which needed a substitute for a man now called up for active service. The Crown Prince felt a thrill of revived regard for Sister Kläre, whose image came quite clearly before his mind. Speaking very close to the instrument, he said he wished her heart would plead with such warmth and eloquence on his behalf. Anyone who did not know Sister Kläre, might imagine all sorts of foolish things about her. Oh, replied Sister Kläre innocently, in a hospital, one learned to set more by an individual than did the authors of the war bulletins. The Crown Prince pretended to be taken aback by Sister

Kläre's vehemence; however, he said it was an appropriate moment to do something for an author, as he happened to have three newspapermen to dinner that evening; and he made a note of Private Bertin's name and unit. Sister Kläre, delighted to have so far succeeded, began to read him a flirtatious little lecture on his dilatory habits; he must do what was necessary at once, take no notice of any objections, and show this major fellow who was really in command of the Fifth Army. The Crown Prince was delighted; she was a really sporting young lady, whom he would make a point of seeing again as soon as he could; he would certainly pay a visit to Dannevoux hospital, and look up the sapper lieutenant; and he would have a telegram sent off to the A.S.C. battalion that very night. And as he was talking, in his best and most gallant manner, he remembered his guests; he got up, and still bent over the instrument, began the parting salutations, made an appointment for next Saturday evening; Sister Kläre thanked him warmly in her cool, calm voice, and said she must run away now as the line was urgently needed—an air-raid warning had just come in. The Crown Prince said anxiously that he hoped the A.A. batteries and the M.G.'s would keep Franz busy, and hung up the receiver. He lit a cigarette, and strolled back to the small, brightly lit dining table, on which the champagne glasses had just been filled. There was something so detestably unfair about an air-raid.

For the last few seconds Keller the cuirassier, had been standing beside Sister Kläre, pointing to the sudden light on the second-line dial. It was, indeed, the whinny of a horse that had fetched him out a few moments before. Horses were his passion, and it was a constant regret to him that there were none of these beloved beasts in the hospital stables. He knew that whinny; it was Father Lochner's chestnut, a good average gelding called Egon, well-groomed though only too obviously underfed, on



which he came and went while they were treating his carbuncle. And Keller hoped for a chance of holding it by the curb-chain, stroking its soft coat, and breathing that familiar odour that every horseman loves so well.

And so it proved; in the moonlight, Pechler, the bath-orderly, was just leading out the horse, which whinnied with pleasure at the prospect of getting back to its own stable. Meantime Father Lochner was vigorously shaking hands with the commandant, thanking him for an excellent evening, and invoking every sort of blessing and prosperity on his admirable institution. Then, corpulent as he was, he swung himself smartly from the stirrup into the saddle. He looked very like a cowboy, in a riding cloak and a broad-brimmed hat rakishly upturned at one side. And he rode away towards Dannevoux where he was to spend the night. The sauterne had been excellent, and he had enjoyed a lively argument with his host, which had, in fact, arisen out of the extremely sceptical views on the value of life expressed by the commandant that afternoon by the bedside of that unprepossessing but intelligent compositor—what was his name again?

When a man has been strictly abstemious for a couple of weeks, even the lightest wine affects him at once. But it makes the heart glad, as the Bible says, comforts those in mourning, cheers the halt, and brings sweet sleep to the just; moreover, twenty minutes slow riding—it was about eleven o'clock—would be just enough to ensure him a good night's rest. The night was clear and moonlit.

Some distance ahead the road divided into two shining bands of ribbon; one going to Dannevoux, the other bearing to the right and downhill to Vilosnes-Ost. Dr. Münnich, looking in his *litevka* more like a major than a surgeon, stood for a moment and watched the robust outline of the church militant on horseback; then he sent everyone back indoors and walked in after them. And, still inwardly chuckling over the contrast between the good priest's dashing appearance and the silver cross at

his throat, he did not notice the haste with which Keller slipped into the telephone room, and shut the door behind him.

Keller was indeed in a hurry; while still outside he had heard the insistent whir of his apparatus. Impatiently he plugged in, and received a report from up the line, through the intermediate station at Esnes, that an aeroplane was approaching, and he had better pass the news on as usual. When the telephonists and sentries in the various camps and units received reports of air-raids, they repeated them to the nearest exchange.

Meantime the telephone was also buzzing in the shed that served as a station building at Vilosnes-Ost terminal. It buzzed, but no one heard it. The railwaymen, who were in charge of the place by day, were sleeping the sleep of the just after their exhausting labours. They had a sort of understanding with the A.S.C. men that their sentries should rouse them in case of need. But how could the A.S.C. sentries hear the frantic buzzing of that ancient apparatus? No one slept near by; the railwaymen liked to be comfortable. They and the A.S.C. preferred the roomy huts on the further side of the railway station. In the event of an air-raid there were dugouts in the side of the hill where they could take refuge; but they had to be turned out in good time if they were to get there. The telephone buzzed and whirred. Where—where was the sentry of the Barkopp working party? Did he mean to let his sleeping comrades awaken in the next world, in case that accursed airman did come over?

Bertin, leaning on his rifle, stood meditating between the two railway tracks; not so far away that he could not hear, but too absorbed to raise the alarm. At that moment he was possessed by the emotion of self-pity. If he had been sensible, he would, like the other more experienced men of the company, have distrusted sergeant-majors and all their works; and on that occasion at Küstrin he should have let himself be drafted off to the

East, instead of volunteering for the West; he then would still have been what in fact he was, a clean, upstanding fellow, and he could have done his duty equally well in the East. But he had felt he could not face the Eastern front; there were too many lice, too much snow and cold, impassable roads, dirty towns, and in those towns a great many Jews—East European Jews with unpleasant habits, and a sort of flatulent Judaism that he knew he should detest. He had been honest enough to admit it, and he admitted it now; he merely found the punishment a little stern for so trifling a transgression. Surely a Jew might confess that there were Jews he did not like; but that he did like the Prussian military system, its discipline and order, its neatness and its regularity, its spruce uniforms, its warlike spirits, its proud traditions and its tremendous power. Such were the ideals in which he had been trained. And now, after two years' service, there he stood, a truly pitiable figure, his pockets full of bread stolen from those who would nearly starve without it. A Berliner of these days would of course congratulate him on a very neat bit of work. Many illusions had been unmasked in the last two years, and one of them was the ancient legend that it was glorious to die for one's country. Not at all! It was an abominable thing that a young life should be thrown away before it had come to fulness. And yet, though he hated to think so, it was often unavoidable. Women and children and old people could not be exposed to the onslaught of the barbarian hordes by whom his Silesian home had so constantly been overrun. And Bertin cursed himself for his crude Prussian patriotism, his callow folly in seeking adventure, without suspecting that he was being gradually inveigled into the service of the ultimate enemy of all mankind—force. It was a little late to make his discovery, after sinking to the level of the plundering nomads, whose exploits were held up to horror in the history books of his boyhood. He and his like had plundered the Silesian peasants and townsmen



of the food which they had provided against their own needs. He was, in fact, no better than a barbarian marauder.

Then he heard the buzz of the telephone bell. In a flash he was awake, with all his wits about him; he flung the shed door open and flashed his torch into the tiny switch-room: empty. He grabbed the receiver, and held it to his ear; air-raid alarm! Warn all exchanges! A vision of five trucks of explosive flashed into his mind. Fifty living men dependent on his promptitude. Bertin bounded over rails and sleepers, and flung open the doors of the railwaymen's hut. "Tumble out! Air-raid!" He left the door open, so that the inrush of cold air might rouse the sleepers, and dashed off to wake up his comrades. He had no fear for himself, nothing but wild excitement at the events of this extraordinary night. He stood in the doorway, heard Sergeant Barkopp curse the sudden draught, drummed on the plank floor with the butt of his rifle, and mercilessly banished what remained of sleep; it was not for nothing that a certain private had once slept blissfully through an air-raid. On that occasion there had been a hundred and fifty yards between men and ammunition; here there were only fifty. He looked up and listened. Yes, he could distinctly catch a faint but sinister humming sound high up in the sky. Somewhere near Sivry a searchlight shot upwards; the chameleon tongue, broadening at the tip, was feeling for its prey. It was joined by a second, which seemed to come from behind the main railway station of Vilosnes-Ost. A third, from Dannevoux. And now the anti-aircraft guns began. From behind the hill and beyond the railway they boomed and crashed; and from the slope of the hill came the deep rattle of machine-gun fire. Look out, Franz. The shafts of light swung and clashed and crossed, the shrapnel burst in dark-red puffs, and a hail of bullets tore upwards into the sky. Be careful, Franz, lest you come crashing to the ground, before you have dropped those ill-omened

eggs of yours. A half-dressed throng of A.S.C. men stumble through the moonlit night and plunge into the dark hollows of the dugouts. The earlier arrivals crouch against the further walls, the men of the working parties have to find cover nearer to the front. One solitary man remains outside: Bertin. He must stay and see what happens. Sergeant Barkopp yelled at him good-humouredly to get out of the rain. Bertin, peering upwards, with his hand over the peak of his cap, shook his head; there was plenty of time yet. Where was the Frenchman? Had he turned off towards Stenay, the Crown Prince's headquarters? And Bertin prayed that the Prince might come to no harm before his transfer had been arranged to the court-martial office of the Lychow division.

Up in the air twelve hundred metres high, Jean Francois Rouard leaned over the edge of the plane, peering downwards through his night binoculars. The whole countryside looked so confoundedly different from what he saw beneath him in the daytime. The silvery sheen of the moonlight was a poetic myth; beneath him lay a grey and veiled expanse in which the line of the Meuse was hardly discernible. He ought never to have let himself in for a bombing raid that night. However, an order was an order, and the time had come to drop that childish photographing, and do a serious job. The four pointed missiles were slung beneath the belly of the machine; they had looked like sleeping bats hanging head downwards from the eaves of a barn. He wished he were rid of them. . . . Where was the curve of the Meuse, and that damned railway cutting which was his objective? He flashed his torch on to his time-sheet, map and watch; he must keep straight on. In the roar of the engine the shrapnel-bursts could not be heard; but they could be seen, as he leaned over in search of some sign that might indicate the end of that numbing uncertainty, that hurtling turmoil of his first night-bombing raid. According to the time-sheet, they must

fly straight ahead for two more seconds, then turn, to get a better aim, and then—a jerk at the switch; by God it was a filthy job, but life was a filthy job those days, and it was no good complaining. . . . A quick nose-dive to verify his damage, and that was the most perilous part of the whole performance. . . . Ah—there was a light, a tiny glimmer just ahead on the left. Probably someone stumbling along between the rails. A tap on the pilot's shoulder imperceptibly altered their course.

Below, a witches' sabbath reached its height: the boom of the guns, the scream and crash of the bursting shells, the malignant rattle of the machine-guns, the probing shafts of the searchlights, and the deepening roar of the aeroplane and its propeller. Bertin was now shaking with excitement, and his whole soul leapt forth in exultation at the wild tumult of the conflict that tore the night to tatters. But a few hours before he had been attacking the principle of force, and now it roused him to an ecstasy. How was this? A man's mentality must have been degraded to that of a sergeant-major to thrill him in this fashion at the tornado of explosions, and the sight of that speeding airman overhead. Had he become a savage as well as a thief? Alas—had there been any need for him to become one? Had he not been a savage all the time? Had he not bullied his brothers as Glinsky had bullied him? Had he not, like Jansch, done a violence to a weaker and nobler fellow being than himself, his wife, Lenore?

He saw a vision of young pines, grey-green under the dull blue sky of Brandenburg. It was the clearing between Wilkersdorf and Tamsel. He was in the uniform he had been wearing for three months; and he must needs prove his manhood on her, because she would not lie with him under the open sky. He cursed her, and flung her down upon the moss, struggling and indignant; and terrified her as he had terrified a little boy who had tried to follow her, and he did his will upon her, then and there. What



sort of deed was that, with all the misery, torment, and horror that came after it? It was in the true sergeant-major tradition—to get by intimidation and brutality what he might have won in the gentler fashion of a lover. Hurtling steel and riven earth, wreathing fumes, the shattering fury of the guns, the whistling hail of bullets, all the vast upheaval and wreckage of war, all that was no more than the outburst of exasperated weakness; anyone could press a button. In July '14 he, Bertin, would not have pressed that button. But in July '15, give the truth its due. . . .

Bertin clung to the post at the entrance to the dugout; a sudden nausea turned him dizzy, and the outlines of the trucks, not forty yards away, still standing quietly on the rails, ominous in the ominous moonlight, begun to quiver and spin round before his eyes. But before the sergeant could ask him what was the matter, a dull detonation shook the hill above their heads; and a second followed. Splinters of stone rattled down from the dugout roof. The fire from the anti-aircraft guns redoubled, and the rattle of the machine-guns grew more frantic; but above it all the roar of the propeller was still audible, though now more distant. The railwaymen sat huddled against the wall, and the A.S.C. men further forward in the darkness; Bertin, feeling suddenly faint and sick, crouched on the wooden edge of the wire bunk. A torrent of excited talk resulted in the conclusion that the raid had been much noise to little purpose. Franz had missed the ammunition trucks, and, confused by the counter-fire, had dropped his bombs somewhere on the ridge, behind or in front of Dannevoux; the second bomb, from the sound of it, had probably torn a hole in the path up the hill.

Slowly Bertin stretched his aching knees. Half an hour more on duty, and then he could go to bed, and lie for four hours enveloped in blankets like a chrysalis, just before the grand transformation. His second turn, from four to six, would be, he hoped, a more cheerful perform-

ance, with birdsong and sunrise, when he would try to recover his self-command. But this last half hour was going to be an ordeal; he hurriedly lit his pipe, felt better, and listened vaguely to the talk around him. Sergeant Barkopp shuffled off to bed; tomorrow was also a day, and a day off duty too. Bertin went on smoking, strictly against orders, as he made his way out of the dugout with Karl Lebede and Hildebrandt, who was shortly to relieve him, and stumbled across the rails, past the ammunition trucks into the centre of the valley, Karl Lebede stopped, turned, and peered up at the hillside above them. There was a flicker of red along the ridge. The bomb must have hit an old shed or stack of timber, observed the tall Swabian. Kark Lebede said nothing, wagged his head back and forward on its short thick neck, looked round once more, and departed to bed. Bertin shivered. His rifle suddenly weighed nine pounds. It had been a long agitating day, and about midnight Nature said—enough! But alas, he was still on duty. His pockets, stuffed and bulging, dragged at his shoulders.



## CHAPTER IV: THE TILE FROM THE ROOF

LIEUTENANT KROYSING, in his bed against the outer wall of his room, was already fast asleep; only the faintest spark of waking consciousness still connected him to the earth's crust, on which things happen; his reality was, for the moment, that of a dream. Flight-Lieutenant Kroysing was flying over the Channel, in his ears the roaring of the sea wind and the glorious thudding of his engine. Beneath him heaved the grey billows of the North Sea; and he sped on, untouched by the spurting spray, unharmed by the shells from the battleships' great guns. In his dream he saw them soar up towards him, hover for a moment, dip, and hurtle downwards into the waters. But the pert little machine-gun bullets whistled upwards, dropped in curves and constellations on his wings, and transformed the aeroplane into a butterfly—a death's-head butterfly that carried ruin to great cities. Beneath him appeared an English city, full of English people, planned like Nürnberg; yonder was the castle, home of Alfred the Great and of Christopher Columbus; let us drop one on the chimney. His hand had already reached for the bomb-switch, when a shell burst close beside it, and with a sudden start, Eberhard Kroysing was awake. The lieutenant's room was in an uproar; why, of course, it was the airman paying a visit to the railway station in the valley. All the batteries and machine-guns in the neighbourhood were spitting death at him. For one instant Kroysing was on the point of jumping out of bed and giving the alarm. Then he was ashamed of his impulse, for this was a hospital and no. . . . He could not follow his thought to the end.

Sitting upright in bed, all ears, he tried to penetrate

the convolutions of the enemy's brain—that enemy, whose fellow-fighter in the air he was so soon to become. And his heart yearned for the time when he should pay Franz back for this visit. Behind all the tumult he could hear in the darkness the thudding of the approaching engine, in spite of Lieutenant Flachsbaumer's snores. (The poor fellow lay embedded in sleep: his wife was dangerously ill of a septic inflammation of the bowel, and he suspicious, as all men become in hospital, was convinced there was sepsis in another organ.) . . . The guns seemed to be putting up a pretty show. He hopped out of bed and flung up the windows, and watched the white ribbons sweeping across the sky, and the flashes of the anti-aircraft batteries.

A dark-red puff of shrapnel, and another; the roar of the aeroplane engine almost drowned the savage rattle of the machine-guns. Kroysing, leaning half out of the window, peered upwards; nothing but sky, clashing shafts of light, and a few stars. A figure almost as tall as himself ran past beneath him, and returned in a few seconds; and a hoarse voice, almost as deep as his own, shouted: "Hi, you there—take cover!" And the man vanished. Kroysing ignored him. Little Bertin would be in for this, he was out on sentry duty at that very moment. Yes, it was just about eleven, and he was taking No. 2 shift. Well, he was a stout lad, as Kroysing had noticed more than once; he would be giving the alarm soon.

But hadn't the sound above him changed? It had indeed. It was almost imperceptibly louder, and nearer to Kroysing. So little could be seen out of that damned window, which faced in the direction of Dannevoux. And it was hardly decent for an old soldier with his leg still bandaged, to disobey the doctors' orders and go out into the night air. Slightly sobered, Kroysing stood up in his pyjamas, about to step back into the room. But what was that? The fellow was slowly planing down—could he, Kroysing, be still dreaming? Had his dream continued, half-inverted, as often does happen? "This is a hospital," he yelled;

"you can't drop an egg around here!" As he listened, intent upon the sound above, a sudden certainty shot into his heart; the fellow had missed his way, and was going to drop a bomb on the hospital by mistake, unless the A.A.'s brought him down first. "Shoot!" he roared; "shoot you bloody fools—shoot!" Suddenly the engine stopped. Had they got him? They had! Kroysing dropped his arms with a gasp of relief; not fellowship, but enmity ruled the world.

And then he, standing in the darkness, and gesticulating out of the window in his gay-coloured pyjamas, a soldier old in all the ways of the war, heard the shrill, familiar whistle, the high-pitched shriek, that preceded a falling bomb. The onrush of imminent fate was in that sound: "I come," it said, "to extinguish life, to kindle a fire."

The engine had been switched off while the machine planed downwards, now the thudding started once again. Fire from Heaven was a good thing; Prometheus, benefactor of mankind. "Wait . . . wait . . . wait . . . until I crash," hissed the hurtling missile; "I, man's thunderbolt, docile instrument of ruin." A bomb takes almost six seconds to cover the hundred and sixty yards that this one had to fall. But it did not fall on a leaderless pen of sheep. A man, whose damaged leg now served him like the other, tore open the door of Ward 3 and yelled: "Look alive! Air-raid!" After the men, the woman. He grabbed the door-handle; a glare of light—empty; and the window ajar. And as a wild uproar burst forth in Ward 3, and the lights flashed out, at the end of the corridor a form appeared, and just before the bomb crashed Kroysing heard the roar of the emissary of death above the roof. In a fury he seized the water carafe by Kläre's bed and hurled it at the ceiling, into the very jaw of death. "You cowardly swine!" Then the bomb tore him into bloody fragments.

A gust of flame shot up. The bomb had hit the corridor, just between Room 9 and Ward 3. Seven or eight of the fugitives were flung in a struggling heap; splinters of iron



sheeting, beams, burning wood, and blazing tarboards, flew in all directions, and almost in a moment the whole outermost wing flared up like a funeral pyre. The wounded, bandaged as they were, beat and kicked and fought their way through the furthest of the three doors. From the wreathing, choking fumes and smoke came screams of agony, the groans of men trampled underfoot, and the yells of those caught by the licking flames. They were lucky whom the bomb had killed outright. On his bed, the planking around him all ablaze, lay the body of Pahl the compositor. Only his body: the wise head, so sorely needed by his fellow workers, had been shattered by the explosion like a hen stamped flat by a horse's hoof. He had been fast asleep, just as, nine months ago, he and Lebede had been so astonished to find their friend Bertin. But before his eyes had even opened, he was a corpse. Nothing would be left of him: the brain and skull were scattered, and the slow relentless flames reduced his disfigured body to the ashes into which his bed and the whole wing gradually collapsed.

Meantime, the commandant, the night watchmen, and the orderlies all rushed up. It was fortunate, thought the commandant, as he shouted for the chemical extinguishers and had the hose unwound—it was fortunate that the bomb had fallen on No. 3, which contained the light cases. Not a soul could have been saved from No. 1. Enveloped in blankets, the occupants of the burning wing thronged the sheltered side of the yard, and the southern veranda where patients could lie in the open air. The matron held a brief roll-call, to see how many were missing, and who they were. The carbonic acid from the red iron containers was already hissing on to the flames, the light cases were helping the telephonists to lengthen the hose, while Pechler, as an authority on water supply, soon had a stinging jet of water playing on the burning mass, dashing the wreckage aside and tossing debris into the air. "Look out—tarboards!" yelled the rescued men, for whom

the disaster had now become a rather exciting entertainment. Sister Kläre lay on the matron's bed in a dead faint. It was thought strange that so self-possessed a woman should have been so utterly prostrated. No doubt the shock of her miraculous escape had been too much for her now that the peril was past. . . . Not one in the burnt-out wing seemed to have escaped. Stay, someone had indeed been saved: Lieutenant Flachsbaumer, who was quite unhurt. The bomb that crashed through the roof, exploded in the corridor, and set the wing on fire, had passed him by. It had merely awakened him with some abruptness and warned him that something was afoot. He had clambered out of the window while the building was blazing above his head, and with complete composure, lowered himself down the outer wall, reaching the ground without a scratch. And that happy result, he reflected, was simply because a fellow didn't care whether he lived or not, because his heart was sick within him over a little girl at home who had got some old abortionist to rid her of a baby that was not his. What did it matter, whether the baby was by Herr F. or by Herr Y., what her parents thought or whether people talked. The main thing was to be alive; so long as he could go on living, see with his eyes, hear with his ears, think with his head, smell with his nose—were it only the reek of tar and burning flesh. His escape was, in very truth, a miracle. He must write to the silly little goose and tell her to hurry and get well, and never mind about anything else.

Twenty minutes after the bomb had fallen, lorries appeared from the Headquarters at Dannevoux, bringing men from the large depots, sappers with picks and axes, and infantrymen with spades. The front half of the men's ward, and the sisters' rooms across the corridor, could yet be saved, though too soaked with water and littered with wreckage to be habitable for the moment.

The second bomb . . . A solitary rider stopped abruptly on the road to Dannevoux, and turned in the saddle, as

the white shafts swept across the dome of heaven, and the deafening uproar of the guns began. Father Lochner, under his cowboy hat, was quite oblivious of any danger to himself; but he was apprehensive for the A.S.C. men below, who did not belong to his division, but to whom he was to minister before Easter. They were said to include a few Polish Catholics. Suddenly a shrapnel case hurtled to the ground beside him. "Dear me," said he; this human counterpart of the lightnings of the Almighty appeared to be not without its perils. For one precious second Father Lochner hesitated whether he should set spurs to his horse and gallop on to Dannevoux, or whether he had better turn round and take refuge in the hospital for the few minutes the attack lasted. Unluckily for him he did neither one nor the other. He stopped where the roads forked, sorely tempted to take the downward road, and slip into the comfortable shelter of the hillside and the curved black shadows cast by the rounded height above his head. The horse, far wiser than his master, snatched impatiently at the reins in his eagerness to get on. He was frightened by the uproar and the darkness; a horse has a long back to protect when strange objects come dropping out of the air, and no sooner had his rider given him the direction than he set off at a canter along the miry lane. It was with difficulty that Father Lochner brought him to a standstill when they reached a spot that offered a little deceptive cover. It laid its ears back and began to rear and plunge as the slope behind him thundered and shook. Escape he must—across the road, down the hillside—anywhere! It was the animal's nervousness that had forced a heavy machine-gun company to get rid of a good horse for a more placid animal.

Lochner, who was little scared, and was a kindly as well as sensible man, dismounted, held the quivering beast by the bridle, and soothed it, looking at the sky as the animal flung up its head. There he saw the body of the aeroplane in the glare of the searchlights, barely



a hundred yards above him, a large white structure thudding over the hill—the curve of its belly, the pale cross of the wings, the circled badges, the wires and struts; all stood out with spectral clarity to the vision of the solitary priest, just at the moment when the Frenchman was about to finish off his raid, plane upwards, and depart. Of the very few who ever saw the bomb that was to kill them, one was Benedikt Lochner, of the Order of St. Francis, Catholic chaplain on the western front.

It was almost as useful to wreck a road as a railway, so the little painter Rouard pulled the switch, as he got a clearer view of the country beneath him, and Lochner saw—saw in the ray of the searchlight, a bright drop detach itself from that moving monster, as it might have been a drop of sweat or dirt, and hurtle downwards. He fell on his knees. He knelt at his horse's feet, his hands clutching his little silver cross. The aeroplane had long vanished into the night; with eyes fast closed, while the horse stood with its neck across him, chewing, he filled the void within his breast with prayer; that the Father in Heaven would preserve him, that the Virgin would graciously take him under her protection, that the Son of God would shelter and receive his soul. "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," cried the noiseless voice, and then broke into that old, old prayer, beginning "Our Father." He did not pray in Latin, as his custom was, German words welled up into his mind, and drowned the hiss of the falling bomb. And he saw, imaged from his childhood days, the majesty of the Trinity enthroned on painted clouds, the Father, bearded and robed, his hands outspread in blessing; on his right the Son, and above their heads the haloed Dove; and at the words, "and forgive us debts as we forgive our debtors," the missile crashed with a red glare and a roar. A good twelve yards away Rouard's bat had burst a hole in the road-way, flung something like an avalanche of earth down the hill, and scattered a hail of splinters. They struck with equal force

against the dead wall of the hillside, as against the quivering flesh of the man and the horse. Lochner was hit in the chest, the horse in the neck and leg. A shriek was the last sound that Lochner heard—whether his own, or from the animal that collapsed and crushed him, none can tell. Their groans and blood were mingled; and next morning infantrymen would appear from the neighbouring position, wag their heads over the holes these aircraft bombs could make . . . and say: “gosh, they’ve wiped up a padre this time.” Then they would calmly produce their cooking pots and knives, and cut the juiciest bits off Egon’s carcass, to grace their evening meal.



## CHAPTER V: THE SURVIVORS

MAJOR JANSCH, looking rather pale, was pacing up and down his office. He was wearing thick felt slippers, for there was a draught along the floor. He had roared at his batman, Kuhlmann, in a pallid fury, and threatened to send him back to his unit, because the cocoa had been too hot. He had stamped on a too venturesome spider; he had . . . The orderly room below was well aware of his state of mind; if his friend Niggel did not come to see him and put him in a better temper, no one would go near him that day. No one, except Corporal Diehl. He was in a mood of grave exaltation for the very same reasons that had aroused Herr Jansch to impotent fury. For Corporal Diehl had discovered that the world was not quite so evil a place as it had seemed; even among the Prussians, the weaker sometimes found protection. Diehl would, if necessary, venture into the lion's den.

But it was not necessary. Spring had come, the day was one of glancing showers; but Herr Jansch was too indignant to be aware of spring. In the first place there had been a shocking air-raid that night. Damvillers railway station had notified him of a breakdown in the service, and indeed he could see the damage for himself. From the depths of his cellar, Major Jansch had heard the explosions of the two bombs. Moreover, it had been once more established that the Jews were omnipotent, even in the Prussian army, though for a year or even two, they had successfully pretended to be powerless, elusive. Devils that they were. When the honest German thinks he had driven them into a corner, a Hohenzollern steps through a door in the wall, plays the rescuing angel to

the House of Judah, vanishes with his protégé, and the band strikes up the march from Handel's *Messiah*: "Daughter of Zion, rejoice."

Jansch thrust his chin into the collar of his *litevka*, tugged with both hands at his long moustachios, crunched a raspberry-flavoured sweet, and sank a deep shaft into his mental outlook. He had known all along that the Hohenzollerns were no use. They were unreliable folk, these scions of the Burg-graves of Nürnberg; their blood was much too mixed to produce any true monarchs, and fathers of their country. Again and yet again that fatal ingrained softness came to the surface through the thin veneer of strength and character they had painfully acquired in Prussia and Brandenburg. All had signed degrading treaties, all had made bad bargains, all had had dealings with Jews. And after Frederick the Great, things had got worse instead of better. The Guelph and French blood that produced him became only too obvious in his successors. Wilhelm II, and still more so his son, the grandson of the Englishwoman; they were genuine Hohenzollerns. When Frederick III died of his cancer in the throat after ninety-nine days' rule—so his father had told him—he was mourned by all the middle class; but a secret sigh of relief went through Old Prussia; that pompous old liberal would only have let the country down. And then, barely two years later, there happened what never should have been allowed to happen; the dismissal of Bismarck.

That act of betrayal led logically to the collapse of the Prussian constitution, which, as the Pan-German Union reluctantly admitted, seemed inevitable now, half way through the war; a man who could eject the Iron Chancellor as though he had been a faithless lackey, deserved a feeble philosopher like Bethmann-Hollweg, who never opened his mouth but he blundered. Thus far the father; but the son would do no better for all his flattery of the Pan-Germans. He was too utterly undependable ever to make a ruler. Such things brought their own requital,

as anyone with half an eye could see. The dynasty was played out.

Major Jansch tramped round his bleak, map-hung room, in a house on the conquered lands of France. His head echoed with the strains of solemn music, modelled on the dead-march usually performed at funerals, and unfortunately composed by a Pole, called Chopin. From deep within him welled up an all-pervading grief at Germany's destiny, and the ruin that always threatened what was noblest in the world. A quatrain came into his mind, by his favourite poet Dahn:

Make way, ye peoples, as we pass,  
Watch the last Goths go by,

We bear no King upon our shield  
But a dead man to his grave.

Thus ended the conflict between the noble Gothic nation and the crafty, treacherous sons of Eastern Rome, the Byzantines. Honour, loyalty, and heroism had no place in a world, now given over to the progeny of the dwarfs. The rabble always won the day.

There it lay, a document symbolic of the downfall of all hopes; on blue staff notepaper, the Commander-in-Chief of the Crown Prince's Army Group telegraphed through his Q.M.G. that Private Bertin of No. 1 Company was to be transferred forthwith to the Lychow Army Group. Confirmation of his transfer to be reported by telegram. And Jansch knew that was the end of that.

No Iron Cross would ever adorn his chest. If that Jew ever found out anything, and was asked any questions, he had only to laugh and tell the story, and all was up.

The telephone rang; No. 1 Company orderly room, all in a twitter of awe and excitement. A telegram from the Crown Prince! The transfer would be effected that day, Private Bertin sent to Etraye-Ost at once. His papers were already in order, and his leave warrants would be



prepared in a few minutes: he could start that evening, and the battalion could report that the order had been carried out. Major Jansch had learned composure in the course of a long life: Not quite so fast, he said, in a casual tone. No. 1 Company was, like the others, considerably below strength, was it not? The exact position of the Lychow Army Group must first be ascertained; and then, in the course of the day, the battalion would report the whereabouts of the court-martial office. It would do perfectly well if the man started early the next day, or indeed any time during the day. Meantime he must do his work as usual, he might even relieve someone on night duty. Were there no ration parties going up to the front line that night? Had Sergeant-Major Duhn understood? He had. The major hung up the receiver. Miracles often happened. A man had the right to cling to every straw. The French still shelled the railways, and the narrow-gauge lines as well. There was just a chance that Bertin might get knocked out before the morrow.

The major was also labouring under another and a most insistent cause of irritation. Easter was at hand. In a fortnight—by the Frau Major's desire—Herr Jansch must go on leave. This for the overwhelming majority of the soldiers in Europe represented the height of bliss; he merely viewed it with dislike. Here, in the field, he was about as well off as he could hope to be. He was a man in authority. He possessed slaves and servants who trembled before him, and with good reason. He was master of a complete organization. The population of a subject territory had, when they addressed him and his colleagues, to speak respectfully, or he would know the reason why. Here he need fear no contradiction; and though he might not be personally popular, a whole caste stood compactly at his back. But at home . . . He sighed. At home there was no peace; the incessant worry of trivial bills; the daily need of defending his equanimity against the most senseless interruptions; such was his home life. He did not

like women; they were inadequate in every sense of the word; and their querulous, rasping voices got on his nerves. A three-roomed flat in the Windhorststrasse at Steglitz, just outside Berlin—the name of the street infuriated him every time it came into his mind—was not an agreeable place when the Frau Major and the servant, Agnes Durst from Saxony, had their way in it, and a man had always to be rescuing his papers from their ideas of tidiness. For his work was not understood in the Windhorststrasse; indeed, it was rather despised; in the bosom of his family it was estimated in terms of money, and was therefore not considered of any great importance—the family consisting of the maid, his wife, and his son. His son Otto would also be on leave, and this added to his irritation. . . . Lieutenant Otto Jansch, of one of those nondescript infantry regiments which fought in masses and died in masses, without credit or distinction.

But his son had in fact won distinction in the fighting at the end of 1915 on one of the Polish rivers, no doubt more by oversight than for any striking services. Since then he possessed the Iron Cross, and his father did not—thereby losing most of his authority over his son—for all the efforts of his friend Major Niggel to curry favour with the artillery park staff; he did not possess it and he never would, although from the august domain of the Artillery High Command had come the news of the heroic death of a certain Lieutenant von Roggstroh, who had fallen in the small, but in itself successful, action against Bezonvaux, which had unfortunately involved considerable losses. He seemed to have been a decent, good-looking fellow, this Roggstroh, and a member of a distinguished family; well, he wouldn't worry anyone now. The day before yesterday, and even yesterday, the longed-for decoration seemed to be rising above the horizon like the morning or the evening star. But now, all was at an end.

Major Jansch reached for the telephone; then he let his hand drop. What was the use? He must get out of

doors, go and see a friend—Major Niggel for instance, the fresh air would do him good. He rang for his orderly, and told him to lay out his breeches and order his horse.

The streets of Damvillers were gay with spring. Sparrows twittered in the sunshine. Swallows darted through the sparkling air; men hurried to and fro without their overcoats. From the back of his tall charger Major Jansch peered about to see whether they saluted him with proper smartness. On the meadow beyond the town some companies were being drilled, and from the machine-gun practice ground came the rhythmic crackle of blank cartridge. Major Niggel was not at home, he had ridden over to see Captain Lauber, the commandant of the sappers. Major Jansch hesitated a moment, then he decided, under pressure of his news, he would go in search of his friend. He did not much like Captain Lauber, these Swabians were all poisonous democrats, the whole pack of them. But, in his present mood, he swallowed his aversion, turned his horse, rode back at a walk and up to the sapper headquarters.

Captain Lauber sat, plunged in gloom, in a corner of his sofa, and in the other sat his sympathetic visitor, Major Niggel. For so rare a visitor as Major Jansch, a chair was set out, and he was offered a glass of Kirsch and a cigar. No, Captain Lauber did not feel up to smoking a cigar that day. He had just received some most painful news through brigade headquarters from the Dannevoux field hospital; the airman who had smashed up the Damvillers railway station had previously attacked the Dannevoux hospital. It was, of course, a breach of international law. Naturally the French would maintain that it was a mistake, if the Red Cross delegates put up any complaint. They might punish the airman or cashier him, or they might not. But that would not bring Lieutenant Kroysing to life again, who had been killed with a number of other wounded. Major Niggel wagged his bald pate in commiseration; his little blue eyes looked into the captain's



dark ones with sorrowful and kindly understanding.

Was it the Lieutenant Kroysing, he asked, beside whom he had fought at Douaumont? And Captain Lauber nodded. It was indeed; there was only one lieutenant of that name in the army. And there were very few officers like him. He had always thought a great deal of Kroysing, and expected him to go far. It was from just such highly tempered steel that the bands were forged that held the front together. Such stood surety for a nation's future; good fellows all, on excellent terms with their men, but ruthless in the discharge of duty—when they undertake a job, they never leave it till it's done. Just when we were all so delighted that he had got out of that blood-bath at Douaumont without a scratch, and hadn't been badly damaged in that little affair on December 14th, a damned aeroplane bomb drops on his head, and rings down the curtain. Captain Lauber groaned. The world that day looked very black. The war in the air degraded the whole conflict into a job for mechanics, photographers, and bomb-throwers—it ought to be abolished in favour of more decent methods that did not involve such senseless sacrifice of their best men. He didn't mean that it wasn't a fine thing to fight for the Fatherland, and meet an honourable enemy on equal terms. Ah well, he always used to annoy his friend Reinhart by telling him that heavy artillery meant the end of respectable war. But this bomb-dropping business was disgusting and dishonourable; that was his opinion, and he didn't mind who knew it. Well, that was the end of Lieutenant Kroysing; no doubt it would be his turn soon. Not that he cared; he rather wished the next airman that came along would crack his skull like his little son cracked walnuts at Christmas. However, until then he must get on with his job. The two visitors got up, and Major Niggl shook the Swabian warmly by the hand. He and Lieutenant Kroysing, he said, had not always seen quite eye to eye—as often happened among friends. But it made him

sick to think that a good man's life had come to such a futile end. He hoped that Lauber would soon get over the shock, and be able to take a more cheerful view of things. With a final, sympathetic shake of his head, he walked gravely to the door and out into the street, where the two horses were tethered; they had been nuzzling at each other in friendly interest, and one of them had laid his neck across the other's mane.

Dumbfounded with admiration of his friend Niggl, Major Jansch followed into the open air. For many years afterwards, whenever he encountered the Bavarian, he recalled his feelings at that moment.



## CHAPTER VI: THE INHERITANCE

TALK in an empty hut is rather apt to raise an unpleasant echo; Bertin and Lebede were therefore conversing in an undertone. In the course of the morning Private Bertin had been told by Sergeant Barkopp himself to pack up at once and get back to the company. Private Lebede had come with him, to see if he could help his friend. The events of the past night, the consequences of which they had viewed that morning, made the two men cling to each other's company that day. The weather was fine; it would be a toilsome but not unpleasant walk to Etraye-Ost. Lebede, the innkeeper and Bertin, the barrister had spread the latter's overcoat out on one of the bunks, with the sleeves folded according to army regulations, and they were now rolling up the garment into as tight and precise a bundle as they could. Both men had been on sentry duty that night, and looked pale. The news of the enemy airman's devastation had been brought over by the railwaymen at about eight o'clock that morning. The two men had barely begun to digest the fact that the world no longer contained Wilhelm Pahl. Bertin shook his head inwardly as he went about his duties, and now and again he shook it in actual fact, to the surprise of the uninformed observer. And three words kept circling through his brain: "Pahl and Kroysing . . . Pahl and Kroysing . . ." And he found himself possessed by a vast and childlike amazement at all the manifold forces of destruction that lie wait for mankind upon this earth. Kroysing and Pahl . . . Pahl and Kroysing . . . What a world, what a comic world.

That day Lebede's pale round face looked more than

usually freckled. His plump fingers rolled up the overcoat with surprising dexterity. "I suppose they'll be digging a common grave this afternoon in the Dannevoux cemetery for those chaps who were done in last night. Well, they won't take up much room." "Precious little that matters," said Bertin rather irrelevantly. In his inner vision he saw a huddle of charred white jawless skulls, and skull-less jaws, and a foot sticking out of a breastbone. Pahl had strikingly small hands for a man, and Kroysing strikingly large ones. "Do you think they'll shove the lieutenant in with the men?" "Hm," replied Lebede; "since you ask me, I should say—yes. The commandant is a sensible chap, and one grave means less work than two. And at the Resurrection, the angel on duty will be able to sort them out. You're in luck," he continued, changing the subject, "you're clearing out. Best thing you can do."

Bertin shrugged his shoulders, bent his gaunt and stricken head. He felt guilty for leaving his comrades in the lurch; he could not deny that it was a burden on his conscience. Meantime Lebede contemplated the elongated roll of his overcoat; an Emperor might be proud to buckle that on his back. Then he bent down to help Bertin with his knapsack—the two ends of it had to be held down fast while he slung the right strap round it, and Bertin dealt with the left one. He said he had always been surprised that Bertin had not got out of it a great deal sooner. "But I belong here—it's my company," murmured Bertin, as he fastened the overcoat straps round the centre of the bundle. Lebede looked at him wide-eyed. His presence hadn't been any earthly good to them or anybody else. No one had dreamt he could be so much attached to his old company. Bertin stepped back, slipped his hands into his pockets, tilted his head sideways, and eyed the knapsack. Well, he had always felt in that way, he said slowly, after a pause; that, and nothing else, was what had been in his mind. He was silent about the mental paralysis that came over him in

a quandary; that would be rather outside Lebede's comprehension. Lebede helped himself to one of Bertin's cigarettes, which his friend was in fact going to bequeath him; he didn't much hold with sentiment, he said. Sentiment was rather liable to get a man into a mess. "Wilhelm," he said abruptly, "would have understood. Sentiment is for refined folks; I often think that they've conventionalized all our sentiment for their own use. You mark my words; what people like us need to do is to think. The more we think, the more we see, and the better we shall get on. You don't mind my regarding you as one of us, comrade?"

Bertin said he didn't mind at all; indeed he was much touched and pleased at being thus included. "I've been thinking the whole morning," Lebede went on, "and trying to make out where we made our mistake, Wilhelm and I; where the gap was in our calculations. And I said to myself, we were too impatient. Here we are, you and I, safe and sound, with a couple of useful heads still screwed on our bodies. But all that's left for Wilhelm is a common grave, and the workers of Berlin must get on without him. However, it's a comfort to think that they *will* get on; though, with Wilhelm there they'd have got on quicker, not a doubt of that. He had a good brain, and worked as hard as he knew how, though he was rather injudicious in the choice of his parents. He enjoyed a joke, though he had all his wits about him; he knew that the ruling classes don't give anything away, though they may present us with a match, as you might say, in return for a box of cigars. And yet, as we now see, his calculations were all off the mark. Where was the mistake, eh?"

Bertin was now folding his blankets, which had to be buckled under the flap of his knapsack. He was not much interested in Lebede's questions; his mind was set on Pahl the living man, on his way of smiling, his pride in his craft, his love of the newspaper quarter of Berlin, with its machine-room, gigantic rolls of white paper in their wooden brackets, the reek of printer's ink, and the



oily fragrance of printed sheets; the Sunday trips to Trep-tow, to the Muggelsee, the steep banks of the Havel by the Great Window, and the grey-green of the Brandenburg pines. How could he pronounce judgment on the mistaken calculations that had cost Wilhelm Pahl his life? Were there any calculations, anyway?—indeed there were, said Lebede; it was not an accident that deprived Wilhelm of his toe, but much careful planning and a rusty nail. Private Bertin received this news with open mouth. No, he hadn't been told about it at the time, for all sorts of reasons; but there was no sense in keeping it dark now. It was Wilhelm's wish, though Lebede had done the deed, and could not therefore shirk the responsibility for what had come of it. Bertin's brain was bewildered. Eberhard Kroysing gone—and Pahl, who had maimed himself deliberately, and Father Lochner—and what would be the end of Sister Kläre? It was too much for one man, with only two ears and one heart, still possessed by his meditations while on sentry duty. He would need a great deal of time to straighten all this out. So he surveyed his dirty finger-nails, and pointed out that as airmen do not make a habit of dropping bombs on hospitals, chance must have guided this particular missile; surely accidents might be regarded as out of the reckoning.

Not at all, said Lebede, the movement took strict account of what were called accidents. The enemy would exploit every conceivable advantage, small or large. Capitalist society, and its wars—those are our enemies, and don't forget it. "Look here, my lad," he whispered mysteriously; "you were talking very cleverly against force last evening, but do you suppose you produced effect? Not on your life! Force dealt its blow, and left us to survive. Well, that teaches us a thing or two that I, as an experienced innkeeper, might have thought of before. What does a good innkeeper do? Sells drink, to make folks cheery. So he does. But now and again he needs to come off duty, and kick out any folks that make a row,

after they've paid for what they've had—that's part of his job too; I've always insisted on decency and good behaviour. And so I've been using force for the general welfare, haven't I? Understand?" And as Bertin pondered and said nothing, he wagged his broad pate. "However, go on attacking force as used by other people. I don't want my rivals to find too many bootboys, especially as I shall have to act as my own bootboy in any case; the world will get more idiotic the longer the war goes on. But an order backed by a rifle—any idiot can grasp that. Such is the lesson learned by a fellow called Lebede; and now he is making tracks for Germany just as quick as ever he can; I'll be out of this before a month's up."

So Lebede thought Bertin was doing the right thing for himself and the best thing for the Cause, in getting himself shifted to the East, where bombs did not drop out of the sky. He had learnt in his own person how the game was played. And now he was going to a place where he would learn a good deal more. The problem of the future was whether the injustice of society could be in the end abolished. A man who sat on a court martial sat behind the bar from which justice and injustice was measured out. He was delighted at this new turn in Bertin's career. . . . "What good could you have done by writing in the papers? None at all. And how long could you have gone on making speeches to the workers while a war was on? Three months at the outside. Then they'd have taken you by the collar, and slung you out here again, and the whole bloody business would have started afresh. No, my lad; you hop off to that cushy little corner just as quick as you can. Keep your eyes open, hold your tongue, and put up a fight against injustice. I'll be glad to hear all about it when we meet after the war. Holzmarktstrasse 47, Berlin O. I can give you a good glass of Patzenhofer, and I daresay you'll meet some of the folks. And now get along. I'll represent you at the funeral. And while the padre's talking I'll consider

how we can best create the force that will abolish force."

They shook hands—a plump hand and a thin one. And Bertin observed with surprise that Karl Lebede had twice as strong a chin as his own, and a narrow mouth and jutting nose, that gave him the air of the picture or bust of one of the great commanders.



## CHAPTER VII: FULL CIRCLE

PRIVATE BERTIN had all his wits about him in these latter days. He did not dream of walking to Etraye-Ost. Were there not lorries, or wagons, for that matter? A soldier's law of life was to get another man to dirty his boots instead of dirtying your own, since you had to clean your own boots yourself. And the drivers were always glad of a passenger for company. Bertin might have seemed rather taciturn, but his driver, a Frisian from Oldenburg, who had worked all his life on a farm, had ideas of conversation that more or less squared with a townsman's view of silence.

Bertin observed in dumb astonishment that fate—or chance, call it what you will—was leading him by the way that he had come, when he first arrived in Verdun territory; from Vilosnes-Ost, where they had detrained, through Sivry-Consenvoyes, then to the left through the woods, where the signpost still stood, bearing the legend: "Not under artillery fire." Then downhill, past dense green walls of pines. It was almost exactly a year since one of that tramping column here opened a letter from his wife, to say that she was arranging for his marriage leave; and as he read it, the first heavy gun he had ever heard burst into a thunderous roar like some primeval forest monster. The spring had come sooner, and the winter had not been so deathly cold. And that, to the outward eye, was the sole and only difference.

But the sense of repetition did not strike him with full force until he entered the orderly room and Sergeant-Major Duhn dryly informed him that he must go down to Romagne-West that night with four trucks of explosive,

picking up three trucks of flares and hand-mines from Damvillers sapper depot on the way. That meant time for a good sleep in the afternoon, and sleep he did, after strolling round the park and camp. The Etraye park, laid out in terraces up the hillside, was much more troublesome to run than the old Steinbergquell park on the road to Moirey; on the other hand it was more immune from bombardment. Bertin came upon a number of old acquaintances, and found himself shaking hands with Halezinsky and Sergeant Böhne. And in the field-gun ammunition section he found little Strauss, from the Moselle valley, who positively chirped with delight and congratulations—though much embittered by the privations of the past winter; and peace seemed as far away as ever. Bertin slept soundly for three hours on Strauss's bed, supped on roast horse-flesh from Bombardier Schulz's private kitchen, borrowed an overcoat, so that he should not have to unstrap his own after all the trouble he had taken to roll it up, reported at the orderly room and then at the park.

The moon was up, but no longer in the same place as on the evening before, when the little motor train had started on its journey. Strauss had pressed an extra blanket on Bertin. So he sat enthroned upon chests of explosive, sucking at a cold meerschaum pipe. With a strange sense of dismay he watched the wheel come full circle. The track ran across country and under cover to Damvillers, where the sappers hitched on their three trucks. And then, yard by yard, rail by rail, the train slid back into the past, into his dead life, and carried with it a man enveloped in blankets, who no longer knew when he was awake and when he was asleep, who opened his eyes with an effort and shut them once again. Yonder was the road along which he had staggered home when Herr Jansch had cancelled his six days' leave last October. That was where the Crown Prince's car had swept round the curve out of sight. In those dugouts, Wilhelm Pahl, already marked for death by a bomb, had spent the night,



when air-raids had made the camp unsafe last July and August. There he was . . . a shadow against the darkness and the smoke, his hands clasped across his breast, bowing, and smiling a little ruefully because his end had come at last. They hovered all around him, pallid wreathing ghosts, souls of men now dead: poor little Vehse; Otto Reinhold, always in a good humour—bless him; and that illiterate Polish farmhand, Wilhelm Schmidt; and the louse-ridden coal-heaver from Hamburg, Hein Foth. Yonder had stood the great cartridge shed where they had worked so hard, and had such arguments.

But only its ghostly semblance stood there now, grey against the falling darkness; above it, Sergeant Karde's severed leg fluttered cheerfully in the breeze, with a couple of dead and grinning A.S.C. men as a guard of honour at the door, for the testing shed for damaged shells had stood on the same spot awaiting the explosion that destroyed it. Up above, to the right, the huts of the abandoned camp stood outlined against the night sky; but where was the field-gun park and the stream that rippled through it? The stream had broadened into a pond, and the new huts of a delousing station or a laundry covered the lower slopes of the valley. The line then followed the course of the Theinte; on the right of it, the road to Ville, and the ravines that led up into Fosses wood, disappeared into the darkness. On the left, little Sergeant Süssmann, his cunning ape-like eyes glittering in his singed and blackened face, nodded a greeting, and the spectral form of Lieutenant von Roggstroh of the artillery, with his gay, defiant smile, hovered above the snorting locomotive; and Bertin knew that he too had fallen, as might have been expected. Over the hills, like a pillar of smoke lit by a reddish glare, towered the gigantic shape of Sergeant Christoph Kroysing, and waved a salutation from Chambrette farm, where the French had long been established. And Bertin muttered a curse, shivered, and crouched down among his crates of explosive; surely

that strange shape, like a tapering candle flame severed at the top, suggested something he had seen. And in a flash he remembered those balloon observers who had been shot down; two smoke columns outlined against the sky. Then a spectral aeroplane spun downwards, the pilot's back covered with a spatter of bullet-holes. And Bertin's heart went out to the handsome brown-faced lad. On the right, a dim expanse of lopped and shattered trees; the name of which was Thil wood. From it came the sudden crashes of exploding shells, dark-red flames and yellow flashes; and Bertin nearly jumped out of his skin. He had slept through the actual gunfire. But before he could swing himself down, the sapper on the hindmost truck told him not to get the wind up; they were a good hundred yards to the right, and Franz couldn't get any nearer, hard as he tried, blast him. Bertin still kept on the alert, but only a few rounds of machine-gun fire broke the stillness, and the equable chug-chug of the sturdy locomotive.

He leaned back once more and surveyed the black expanse of country to his right. Yonder ran the road to Azannes and Gremilly; and there, by a spectral fire that did not exist, the red blaze of a bursting shell, sat Przygulla, the young farm-hand, blowing into the flames and warming his hands—open mouthed as usual, owing to his adenoids, and with fishy eyes fixed on Herr Bertin—Bertin, so clever, and yet so much less sensible than he, Przygulla . . . why, his belly had been ripped open by a shell-splinter, and they were carrying him into the hospital dugout to die like a little child. Yes, remarked Lieutenant Schanz, we of the Prussian tradition have to be pretty severely tested before we come to reason. Bertin shuddered, buttoned himself more tightly into his overcoat, and turned up his collar.

The train stopped for a moment. Here the line branched off on the left toward Romagne, in continuation of the cross section which the Schwerdtlein working party, with the help of the Russian prisoners, had constructed during

the Great Cold. The sapper and his trucks had to rumble onwards into a very unpleasant neighbourhood. The front part of the train, Bertin and his four trucks, turned off into the darkness. Bertin watched the three sapper trucks dwindle into the distance; yonder, to welcome them, stalked a tall gaunt shape in breeches and puttees, laughed with wolfish teeth, and waved a bony hand in long farewell. "It isn't so unpleasant as you think, where I am now"; he heard Eberhard Kroysing's voice reverberate from afar; "I preferred to cut out the flying interlude, and crash at once. Don't forget me, old sport, will you?" Not much chance of that, thought Bertin; and he leapt to his feet as the train braked with a jerk. From a dugout in the hillside emerged a railwayman and took Bertin's papers. This dugout was a halt, called Romagne-West; Bertin could wait and warm himself, and trundle back his empty trucks at about five o'clock. Below, in the harsh glare of an acetylene lamp, stood a little stove, from which came a fragrant smell of coffee; a mugful was handed to Bertin. How long had this show been in existence? Since the French had gradually wrecked the old railway station at Romagne. It was in one of those bombardments that that bumptious Jewish sergeant from Berlin, the chap in the R.T.O.'s office, had gone west; perhaps Bertin had met him? Indeed he had, anyone who had any business at the railway station must have met him, he practically ran the show. So he had gone too—poor Pelican! That night seemed peopled with the dead; he had better not ask after anyone else, Friedrich Strumpf, for instance. It felt almost uncanny to be leaving this place as a living man. And so—good night.

About eight o'clock next morning, freshly shaved and after a hearty breakfast with little Strauss, Private Bertin received his papers at the orderly room; his railway warrants, ration warrants, delousing warrants, and identity papers. His instructions were to report himself for duty



with the court-martial office of the Lychow division at Mervinsk. Where Mervinsk was—it was somewhere in the East—and how to get there, he would discover at the Silesian station in Berlin. Owing to the length of the journey he was to travel by fast trains. Arrears of pay, and ration money, calculated to the exact farthing, was paid out to him in brand new five-and ten-mark notes; he surrendered his share of canteen profits in favour of Halezinsky, the gas inspector. The clerk made a note accordingly. Then they shook hands. "All the best, old chap," said the one; "Same to you," replied the other.

Bertin was amazed to realize that there was something like a lump in his throat. It had been a lousy company; it had plagued him for nearly two years, and treated him with growing harshness and injustice as time went on, but no matter; it was his company, it took the place of father and mother, wife and profession, house and university; it had fed and clothed him, it had been a second home, in which his father was the state and his mother was Germania, and now he must leave it and depart into the unknown. It was not surprising that his eyes filled with tears; but he must be careful no one noticed them.

No one did notice them. When, half an hour later, the crazy little train on the Meuse branch line jolted off to Montmédy, a tanned private of the A.S.C. put his head out of the window and watched that land dwindle into the distance—land which, summer and winter, in sunshine and in rain, by day and by night, had made him what he was. What were little Süssmann's last words before he died? "Tell my parents it was worth it; tell Lieutenant Kroysing it wasn't." The truth lay somewhere between those two extremes, but not, as a wise man had recorded, exactly in the centre.

## CHAPTER VIII: ENVOI

THE village of Ebensee, just outside Nürnberg, glittered in the summer splendour of high June. It lay, like its neighbouring city, at the edge of the ancient pine and beech forests that fringe the foothills of the Franconian Jura. The Schilfstrasse was a road of little villas; from a hotel not far away came the sound of dance music; and the tunes were modern American jazz tunes, foxtrots and the like.

Two young people were strolling like a pair of sweethearts by the white palings that divided the gardens from the pathway. The man wore a thin blue suit, rather threadbare and of a pre-war cut, his neck with its slightly prominent Adam's apple standing out from his open shirt-collar. His gaunt cheekbones, his faintly projecting ears and longish hair, looked less odd in a civilian suit than they had in a uniform; his small eyes peered inquiringly through the thick glasses of new and stronger spectacles. "Number 26," he read out from the paling opposite; "the number was 28, so it must be the next house. Lene, I'm afraid, I don't know whether I shall go in or not."

Lenore, in a soft yellow summer dress, laid her slender hand protectingly on his arm. "You needn't if you don't want to, Werner. You came here of your own free will. Look at that flag there at half-staff."

Werner Bertin looked into the garden of Number 28. There stood a tall white flagstaff, from the centre of which hung the black-white-red flag, motionless. The flag that during the last four years he had seen flying in many lands, in Uskub and Kovno, in Lille and Montmédy, and in all the streets of Germany, now soon to disappear,

had been hoisted in token of mourning, and hardly a breath of air stirred its folds, or the leaves of the cherry trees and the two pines on either side of the lawn. "Here at last," said he, "is someone who takes notice of the day. This must be the house. Can you read the name on the plate?" Lenore shaded her eyes with her hand—her broad-brimmed hat was hanging from her arm—and said: "The name on the plate is Kroysing." A tall gaunt man, with his hands clasped behind his back, walked down from the side of the house to the roadway, and back again, with the absorbed air of one who often trod that path. He stopped for a moment at the fence, a black frock-coated figure in stiff white collar and black tie, turned, and disappeared round the other side of the house.

Werner Bertin pressed Lenore's hand. "That's he; the very image of Eberhard Kroysing. If only that confounded row would stop!" The date was June 29, 1919. On that Sunday afternoon there was dancing, as usual, in all the café gardens in Germany. In the calendar the day was named after the two Apostles, SS. Peter and Paul; on that day, Germany and the whole world was celebrating the signature of the Peace of Versailles, which had taken place the day before. The war was over, and the blockade would now be ended. Bertin and Lenore, and even old Herr Kroysing, would no longer wear such haggard cheeks. It was a day on which the ghastly wounds of four long years were declared healed; but Bertin found himself wishing that Germany would greet that day with more sobriety and depth of feeling. Among the middle class there seemed some sense of what was due; yonder hung a half-masted flag between two pines. But the people were dancing, they were but little moved; nor did they notice that on that day a fresh page in the book of earthly destiny had been turned. Germany danced. Things must get better now. The rifle was flung into the corner, the time had come for work, men were only too willing to forget, and they plunged with ecstasy into the glory of



those early summer days. After years of privation, misery, and horror, mankind had indeed the right to be a little mad. The young author, Bertin, and his wife, were on the way to south Germany, to seek refreshment in a country that they knew and loved. But Bertin had resolved that before they disappeared into the mountains, he would go and see the Kroysing parents and tell them how their sons had died, and in how pitiful and futile a fashion; they must be made to understand that it was no deed of heroism or sacrifice, that had robbed them of two young men who would have comforted them in their old age; it was an act of villainy, and a stroke of chance. He must talk warily, and, as a writer, he knew how to choose his words; but the poor souls must be left under no illusions, they must be made to reject the current coin of patriotism and the glories of war. And here was a flag flying at half-mast, and he who looked like Eberhard Kroysing in old age, appeared once more with set and stony countenance, stepped up to the fence, looked across the street at the young pair, turned and walked back to the house. Into the doorway, at the top of a short flight of steps, came an old lady with a handkerchief in her hand. She raised it to her eyes, in a gesture that had plainly become only too familiar. "Alfred," she called, and in her voice was the echo of many, many tears, "come in to tea." The old official nodded, went up the steps, and disappeared with her indoors. The window in the direction of the band was abruptly closed. The red roofs of the house shone in the summer sunshine; day of St. Peter and St. Paul, day of coming harvest. The black-white-red flag drooped till it almost touched the little circle of gravel in which the white mast stood.

"I can't do it," said Werner Bertin decisively. "Come, let us go into the forest. We are not here to open old wounds and then to poison them. The Government of the Republic, if we get a constitution, will see that justice is done. Besides, there are a few people hereabouts that

won't forget, and they'll give the shock of their lives to certain others that would only too willingly forget." At the bottom of her heart Lenore Bertin did not quite approve of Werner's refusal. What a man has set himself to do, that he must do, she thought. But at that moment she felt much too fond of him to say so; especially as he really ought to have been in a sanatorium, though he flatly refused to enter one. And so there was nothing for a sensible woman to do but to walk with the man she loved, who had so steadfastly endured, and still faithfully believed that governments were wise—dear, wild, foolish heart, into that rich and verdant forest that stood like a frontier-line betwixt earth and sky.

"This meadow," said Bertin, as he slipped his arm through hers; "could be held by one machine-gun against two companies; they could never cross that stream down there. And the edge of the forest would be a first-rate emplacement for anti-aircraft guns."

The meadow was a blue sheen of cuckoo flower and stork's-bill. At the forest edge shafts of sunlight flickered on the grey tree trunks. "Yes," said Werner Bertin dreamily, leaning on his wife's shoulder, "the woods by Verdun looked like that, only much thicker, when we got there." "I wish you could forget those woods," said Lenore tenderly. Secretly she feared it would be long before this man of hers found his way back out of those magic woods into the present—into real life. Within him the conflict had not died; still it surged and thundered. But to look at him—and she sighed softly—no one, thank God, would have thought so.

Like any other pair of sweethearts they passed into the shadowed green splendour of the forest, and the gleam of her yellow frock could still be seen after his blue suit had disappeared from view.



## POSTSCRIPT

THIS novel fills in the gap between *Young Woman of 1914* and *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*. The latter, together with the present book and *The Crowning of a King*, constituted the original project of a large work that was to have borne the subtitle "A Trilogy of the Transition." *Education before Verdun* was sketched out in 1927, and begun first in 1928, and again in 1930. The confiscation of my manuscripts and my expulsion from Germany put off its publication; and the steady deterioration of my eyesight made difficult the final revision of the re-dictated manuscript. The novel *The Crowning of a King* will, unless worse circumstances intervene, conclude the work, and, for all that each of the individual parts is supposed to stand on its own, it will complete the design of a single work.

For loyal help in the reading of proofs I am grateful to my friends, and especially to Lion Feuchtwanger and Hermann Struck.

A. Z.

*Haifa, Mount Carmel.*



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